

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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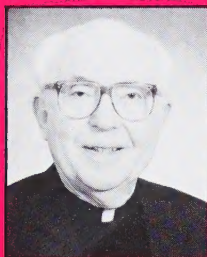
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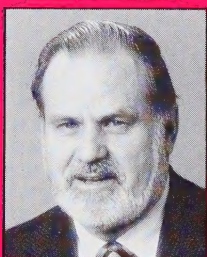




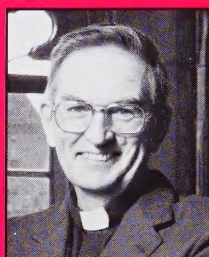
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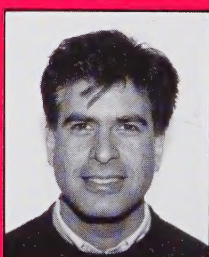
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# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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## CONTENTS

---

5

**WOMEN IN TRANSITION**

Mary Jo Moran, H.M., Ph.D.

9

**PILGRIMAGES SHOW WAY TO PRIESTHOOD VOCATIONS**

Reverend James M. McNamara, M.Div.

14

**MIDLIFE INFATUATIONS**

Lynn M. Levo, C.S.J., Ph.D.

19

**SUCCEEDING AND FAILING**

James Torrens, S.J.

21

**THE BORDERLINE MINISTER**

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

27

**FLAWED COMMUNICATION WITHIN COMMUNITIES**

Mary Ann Flannery, V.S.C., Ph.D.

30

**MALE SPIRITUALITY TODAY**

Daniel M. Pietrzak, O.F.M. Conv., Ph.D.

35

**MONASTIC ASYLUMS**

Benedict Auer, O.S.B., D.Min.

40

**AN AQUATIC METAPHOR**

Reverend Laurence J. Borges

42

**ADDICTION IN COMMUNAL LIFE**

Julie Wokasch, O.S.B., M.Div.

---

2

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

3

**EDITOR'S PAGE**

Bethlehem's Message This Year

48

**BOOK REVIEW**

*Living a Gentle, Passionate Life*

*By Robert J. Wicks*



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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews, which should not exceed 600 words in length, should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Jon O'Brien, S.J., D.O., c/o HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (for address, see above).

Unaccepted manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## BETHLEHEM'S MESSAGE THIS YEAR

**I** found it hard to accept. Downtown stores were already selling Christmas cards, lights, and ornaments. Their window displays announced the arrival of the gift-giving season. Playing quietly in the background, "Adeste Fideles" reinforced the message. The pressure to shop early and avoid the rush was already being applied. But it was still early in the month of October!

It is no secret that most stores in the United States squeeze more dollars into their cash registers in the pre-Christmas shopping season than they collect during all the remaining months of the year. So it is hardly surprising to find that store owners try to exploit the season for all it is worth. The longer they can keep the public in a gift-buying mood, the better it is for these vendors. But for those of us who celebrate the church's period of Advent as a sacred four-week season meant to prepare our souls for the special graces that Christmas brings, it can be downright irritating to see a full quarter of the year spent creating the atmosphere of "Silent Night" and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" for the sake of commercial profit.

As October passed and autumn leaves turned gold and crimson before falling to the ground, ads televised during the World Series broadcast and other network programs gave the impression that Santa Claus might be arriving even before Thanksgiving Day this year. But instead of joyful anticipation, for most of us the month was filled with anxiety about what the weeks ahead might bring.

October's days and nights in Kosovo were charged with terror and the possibility that a Balkan war would erupt at any time. Israeli and Palestinian tensions mounted as the date to carry out the Oslo agreement drew near, and violence still rocked the Holy Land. Two homophobic youths pis-

tol-whipped a gay college student and left him to die outdoors on a freezing night in Wyoming. An ecoterrorist group set fire to a Rocky Mountain ski resort in Colorado, while the president of our country faced the prospect of impeachment because of his scandalous, nation-embarrassing behavior. The danger of recession and a worldwide economic slump became increasingly apparent. Researchers warned that at least a quarter of the adult population in African countries such as Zimbabwe and Botswana will die of AIDS during the decade just ahead. Iraq continued to create weapons of mass destruction, and lethal hurricanes caused a chaotic deluge in the Caribbean and Central America. All this while cash registers throughout the United States were beginning to herald prematurely the birth of our Savior.

I was in line at the checkout counter of a Hallmark store just a few days into October, when the customer ahead of me told me that she was glad to begin shopping for Christmas cards and presents so early because "it takes my mind off all the awful things that are happening in the world." She reminded me of people who read detective stories or gothic novels to escape the difficult conditions or stressful situations that plague their lives. Her remark taught me that while the merchants were hurrying the start of the holy season for their own economic reasons, Christmas, for shoppers like herself, was a welcome distraction that couldn't begin too soon.

It seems to me that we make a serious mistake if we try to convert Christmas into a brief but beautiful respite from the burdens our hearts carry all through the year. I think that especially during this season we ought to remember that it was into this world full of struggle, grief, fear, hostility, and sin that our Savior came and "dwelt among us" to teach us how, with courage, to conduct our lives. Peace, hope, and joy are not achieved by turning away from the world that engulfs and affects us. They are gained by learning, from the family who lived in the



stable at Bethlehem, the way to find meaning and happiness in even the most discomforting and difficult of times.

I wish I were an artist and could send out Christmas cards of my own design this year. I would draw, centrally, the Holy Family. Around them would be shepherds, magi, and angels, of course. But instead of a picturesque hillside and flock of sheep in the background, I'd draw burned-out shells of homes in Kosovo, a cemetery for thousands of hurricane victims in Honduras and Nicaragua, and a multitude of poor people sleeping on the inhospitable sidewalks of Calcutta and New York City. Flying past the star above the Child in the manger, I'd sketch bombers and cruise missiles hungry for targets to destroy.

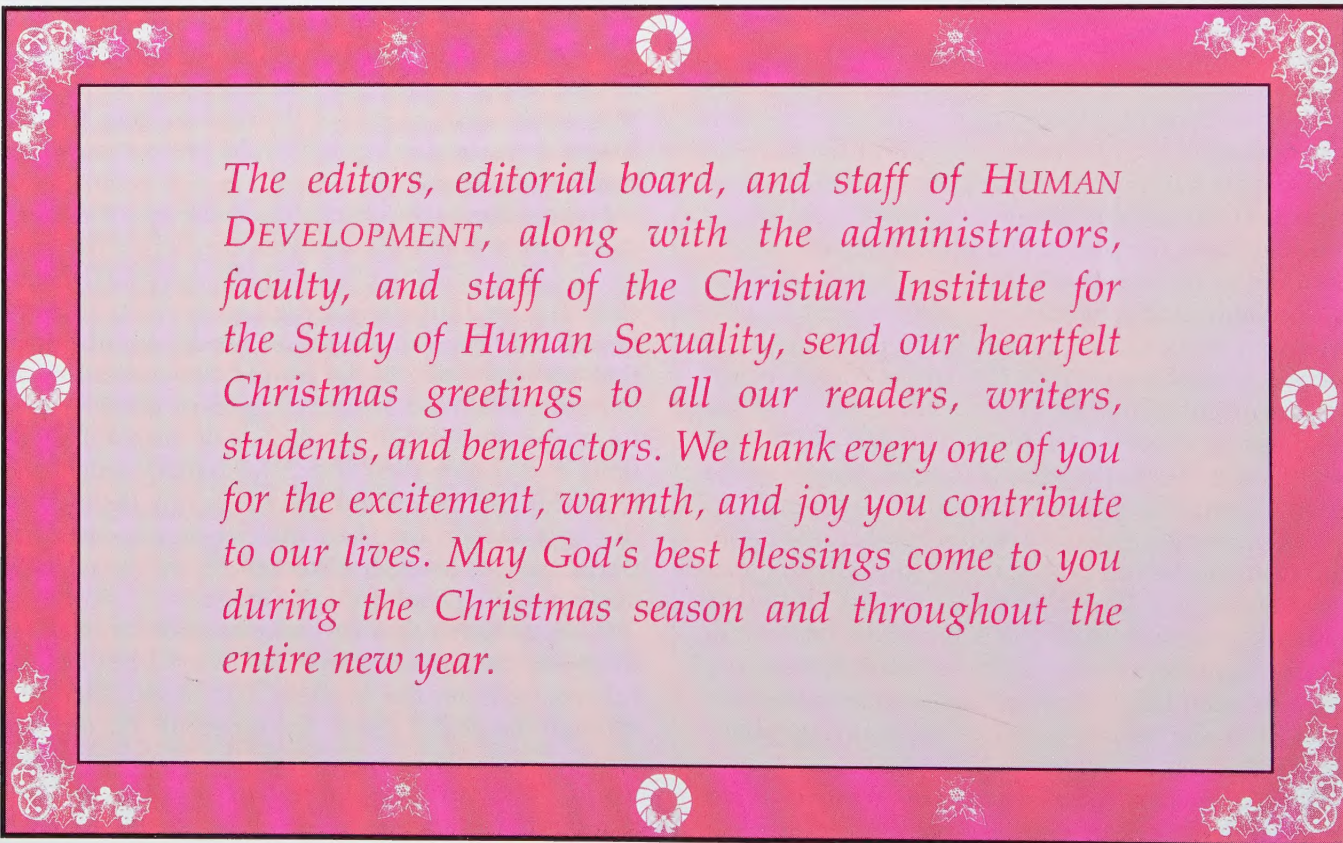
You get the idea. God took on flesh and blood and a family and friends in this very world we live in—not a thoroughly lovely place, but one he still chooses to live in today. He shares his divine mis-

sion with us: we are to serve as instruments he can use to transform the world—to bring it love and peace and joy. An enormous task for sure. But it is an all-powerful Child who has been born into this world and into our hearts to guide and strengthen us. The Christmas season reminds us of our purpose in life and gives us the graces we need to help our Savior save the struggling world and the people we love.

May the angels' song at Bethlehem keep hope and joy in our souls, not just on Christmas—or from October on—but through all the ups and downs of the new, unpredictable, millennium-completing year to come.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief



*The editors, editorial board, and staff of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with the administrators, faculty, and staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, send our heartfelt Christmas greetings to all our readers, writers, students, and benefactors. We thank every one of you for the excitement, warmth, and joy you contribute to our lives. May God's best blessings come to you during the Christmas season and throughout the entire new year.*



# Women in Transition

Mary Jo Moran, H.M., Ph.D.

If we reflect on organizational transitions from the viewpoint of developmental psychologists, we can gain valuable insights into religious life in the United States today. Throughout a transition, instability and stability partner in a dance of life. During our times of stability, we create a structure for our life, devise pivotal alternatives, and aspire to definite ends. In periods of transition, we question the premises of that structure and contemplate unique opportunities. The approach of a transition often leads us to reconsider the past, assess our assets and liabilities, and make projections for the future.

During transitions, periods of uncertainty followed by change alternate with periods of certainty. A transition, as social psychologist Daniel Levinson reminds us in *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, serves to complete a time in one's life "to accept the losses the termination entails; to review and evaluate the past; to decide which aspects of the past to keep and which to reject; and to consider one's wishes and possibilities for the future. One is suspended between past and future, and struggling to overcome the gap that separates them."

A lack of stability is inherent in all transitions, and every transition includes three phases: an ending (that is, a process of loss and separation, which may be total or partial in nature), an in-between time,

and a beginning. Transitions begin with endings, and disenchantment often introduces transitional periods. At the beginning of a transition, uncertainty about who we are commonly ensues and leads us to consider a fuller, more authentic identity. When reality as we have known it begins to crumble, everything seems in flux. At the time of an ending, we must embrace what is, while we let go of what was, both internally and externally.

Phase two, the in-between time, is marked by emptiness and chaos. It is a time of great personal discomfort but also a time to concentrate on and accomplish significant inner work, which can lead to a heightened sense of purpose. It is critical to create a time and space away from what is familiar in order to experience the fullness of this in-between time.

The final transitional phase, the beginning, emerges from the ambiguity of the in-between phase. As we become ready to begin building, living within, and refining a new life structure, the transitional phase concludes, and stability returns. The dance of life continues as it begins a new cycle.

## ELEMENTS OF CHANGE

Change, an integral part of the transition process, is characterized by three elements: time periods



(passages from one chronological life-cycle stage to another), role shifts (adding, eliminating, exchanging, or consolidating vital social roles) and marker events (transformational points—geographic, physical, socioeconomic, or physiological—that begin and shape the period of change).

Do these concepts from developmental psychology relate to the experience of groups of women in religious congregations? Are transitional characteristics and experiences shared by a corporate body of women as they undergo transitions in their corporate life together? Do these changes relate to groups of women who have committed themselves to a life together for mission? What corporate changes do these women experience, and do they lead to collective stretching and development?

Throughout the history of many congregations of women, responding to social and evangelical needs of the times has been an enduring and primary factor in ministry. In addition, as congregations, many groups have been blessed with a higher-than-average number of members who were early innovators. Consequently, these congregations have not waited for the institutional church to set their direction; rather, they have always moved in response to the Spirit's prompting and the needs of people. The marker event for the beginning of the current transitional period for women religious in the United States was the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), which called on them and the church at large to be participants in the modern world.

Most congregations began their corporate transition with communitywide prayer, study, and reflection, which led to chapters of renewal to modify structures governing community life and ministry in the late sixties and early seventies. Each group's objective was to gain greater insight into the living of the gospel according to the founder's spirit, the needs of the times, and the call of the church through the Council documents. In effect, the Second Vatican Council legitimized and blessed many of the ministerial transformations upon which individual members of congregations had embarked, bringing the whole community along with them.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY

In his 1988 book *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations*, anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle wrote, "Many religious congregations today are in chaos. They are not sure about the meaning, contemporary relevance, or mission of religious life and, on the practical level, they find it difficult to cope with often rapidly declining numbers, few or no vocations, and the rising average age of membership."

While aspects of Arbuckle's description are still accurate today, all areas of our corporate life are not in chaos at present—although it would be true to say that all areas have passed through a period of chaos since our chapters of renewal.

Three decades, more or less, have passed since we set off on this path of our journey together. Where are we today?

The move of women religious into the world was significant, both for us and for those with whom we had contact. It was a time of intense struggle and painful letting go—of enclosed spaces, habitual ways of dressing, and defined modes of service. As our journey continued, we no longer controlled the circumstances under which we met the world.

After our initial response to the call of Vatican II, many congregations of women focused their corporate energy on furthering ministry. Instead of staffing their own health care and educational institutions, women religious began to respond to the needs of the times in a variety of places, through a variety of ministries. These changes did not come without struggle and difficulty. Constitutions were written and approved that clearly stated the direction for our ministry as apostolic congregations. A preferential option for the poor was included in many mission statements.

However, even with a clear direction and an equally clear mission statement, women religious have spent considerable time and energy on the issue of how we will individually and corporately actualize our commitment to serve the poor. Only recently have we agreed that some of us will do this through direct service, while others will do it by working toward systemic change. A combination of these approaches will also be utilized by the community as a body and by the institutions we sponsor.

Not wishing to abdicate our institutional commitments, we strengthened existing boards of trustees and incorporated other institutions so that we would be able to influence their basic direction once we no longer had personnel serving in those areas. We also began formal training for sisters who were interested in serving the congregation through board membership. Thus, our hospital boards today, for example, which are primarily composed of laypeople, often have a sister-member who, like her lay counterparts, has been trained professionally in an area other than health care. The same is true of the boards of our other institutions.

Like individual midlife women who reformulate their life goals and dreams to begin new careers and other activities, we have recently initiated other new major projects for our ministry. For example, we have established corporations to unify our efforts in



housing, which currently include shelters, advocacy centers, transitional housing for single parents, and housing for low-income elderly. Similarly, in health care, our hospitals have become part of integrated delivery networks, and we have expanded our long-term care services to include life villages where residents can be assured of care until they die. Through our corporate structures, we hope both to strengthen current efforts in these critical areas and to expand those efforts in response to growing needs.

## CHANGING ROLE OF SISTERS

In addition to changes in ministerial positions, the role of the sister in the church today is also in a state of flux. Once the unquestioning, underpaid work force of a male-dominated church and the recipients of earned esteem, sisters now struggle not only to obtain positions within the institutional church but also to maintain those we have had for years.

Sisters are currently seeking positions that allow for a holistic approach to ministry rather than one likely to lead to burnout. Amid greater awareness of oppressive structures and increasing tensions over just compensation, sisters today are more selective about their place of ministry. Current projections indicate that more and more of us will be working in the public sector.

While all ministry issues are not yet resolved, this is not an area of chaos for congregations of women. But chaos does reign in community life—the area of our corporate life that is currently undergoing the greatest transition. Rather than experiencing our life together as something that empowers us, something that is an essential part of our existence, many of us find it to be something that saps our vitality, something that must be endured. Consequently, some of us are making different choices—to live alone, to live with one or two others, or to live intercongregationally. In turn, these choices cause concern and consternation among others of us.

In her book *Living the Vision*, Barbara Fiand says that “community life has been the neglected piece, the stepchild, if you will, of renewal since Vatican II. It may be that the energy we spent on ministerial training left us precious little for community reform, so that the thoughtful development of a lifestyle suited to the educated adults we had become has lagged far behind—if, in fact, it has been able to move at all.”

While this may be true of many communities of women religious, community life has not been ignored by all congregations. While it may not have received the same degree of attention as ministry since Vatican II, we have made significant changes in

our community life. Local superiors, chapter of faults, and the imposition of identical formal structures on each local group were terminated with the chapters of renewal. Since then, we have emphasized a conscious concern for the quality of community life. Efforts to characterize quality community life as a relationship of reverence, acceptance, sharing, and dealing with conflict have sharpened our search for ways to assist in providing the environment for such relationships.

## RELATIONAL WHOLENESS IS GOAL

The process of dying and rising symbolizes our movement toward relational wholeness. Again, it contains the three phases of a developmental transition: a letting go of the past, an in-between time, and then a moving on to something new. We know we must honor this process; we cannot rush or abort it. We are currently experiencing the in-between time, the time in the tomb. We are in transition. The old way of life is collapsing, and whatever will take its place is in the process of being born.

Sisters are recognizing that they require different community life experiences at different times in their lives. Experiences with a large group require different skills than do living with a small group or living alone. While in the past many of us learned valuable lessons by living in very large groups, today we also learn equally valuable lessons living alone or with one or two other people. What is important is that each sister's living situation allows her room to grow in the areas that meet her current needs. Corporate and individual energy is not being consumed by attempting to keep obsolete structures in place. Instead, resources—both human and financial—are available for all as we experience and live the in-between time. Clearly, pursuing quality of life means we will experience a certain amount of peaceful turmoil.

Chapters have been passing proposals that encourage sisters to explore various forms of affinity groups or other creative means of coming together. This reflects a beginning of our corporate consciousness that community life entails more than those with whom we live in this post-Vatican II era. We have acknowledged that one's local house cannot meet all one's needs and that each of us must take responsibility for finding ways to enrich community life.

Whether we like it or not, addressing intimacy and growth issues means that members need to create a certain degree of group stability by committing themselves to the same community for several years, thus allowing bonding to occur. For a community whose



in-and-out flow brings to mind a revolving door, or for individuals who change communities every few years or whenever relationships begin to make uncomfortable demands, these issues may never surface and certainly will not be resolved; we simply take ourselves and our unaddressed conflicts where we go. We also must learn to say goodbye and acknowledge our loss when someone moves out before we welcome a new person to our home.

The paradigm is shifting. We are all going back to zero. We do not know how community is going to look. As the number of people we live with decreases, the heart of our community life will be shaped by being with one another and others who touch our lives in myriad settings. Our corporate energy is beginning to shift from our housing to the quality of our relationships within the total group.

## FRAMING THE FUTURE

The questions with which many total groups are currently struggling concern not only their residential life together but also their group life together: Do we want to be together in the future? Should we continue to live together? Can we live together in peace and mutuality? Can we welcome other women into our lives at this time? How can we live with tension without polarizing so that we can continue trying to reach a place that honors and respects each of us? Can we reconnect in ministry in a new interdependent style as partners? Can we make choices about what we want to do together in the future? Do we want to call ourselves forth to a larger vision—bigger than each of us but reflective of all of us? What would it look like if we had community?

As groups, most (if not all) of us are in the phase of developmental transition that involves considering wishes and possibilities for our future. We are searching to discover our core values so that we can further describe our corporate identity and set priorities for our future commitments.

Like midlife women who recognize their tendency to repeat patterns and consequently seek the assistance of others in making changes, we recognize the value of outside assistance. Currently, we are engaging a significant number of consultants to help us prepare viability studies and pastoral plans for our congregations. This planning process takes into ac-

count all that has been done over our long history and all that is in motion; it gathers new data through personnel, financial, ministry, and community assessments; it builds in opportunities to reflect on data analysis from the faith perspective of our vocation, our charism, and our history; it uses task forces and committees to study and develop directions and goals; it tests this thinking by eliciting reflection and feedback on working drafts from the total membership and from people with whom we cominister. It is a planning process that will move our groups to an understanding of where we are; then to decision making about our priorities and future together; then, finally, to group ownership of our direction. With this commitment to our direction, the current transition will come to an end.

Like the preretirement and retirement-age women we are as a body, this process will help us set goals that are realistic at this time. It also will stretch us to use our creativity as we continue building the future of religious life. It is a major undertaking, and there is much work before us.

As long as we continue to live the questions, our transition will continue. As we find answers that are appropriate to us at this time in our history, we will conclude this long period of transition and enter the next phase of our life together more skilled in living with ambiguity. We will also enter this phase of our life with heightened creativity. Our gift to the world has no limits except those we fashion ourselves.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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- Moran, M. "Adult Transitions in Women's Lives." *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1996):19-22.



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# Pilgrimages Show Way to Priesthood Vocations

*Reverend James M. McNamara, M.Div.*

*As they were making their way along, someone said to Jesus: "I will be your follower wherever you go." Jesus said to him: "The foxes have lairs, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said: "Come after me." The man replied: "Let me bury my father first." Jesus said to him: "Let the dead bury their dead; come away and proclaim the Kingdom of God." Yet another said to Him: "I will be your follower, Lord, but first let me take leave of my people at home." Jesus answered him: "Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the Reign of God." (Luke 9: 55-62)*

**W**e are facing a crisis in the church that is rapidly moving to a critical point. The alarming shortage of vocations to the priesthood is leading to a crisis that touches the very heart of our identity as Catholics. If parishes cease to be Eucharistic communities because there are no priests to celebrate the Eucharist, we are indeed in trouble. Priests running from place to place as circuit riders to celebrate the Eucharist is not the answer, because the ministry of priesthood cannot be isolated from the life of the community, and the Eucharist cannot be made a commodity that the priest supplies. This may be in

harmony with our consumerist society, but it is not in harmony with Eucharistic theology, which supports an integral connection between the action of Jesus in the Eucharist and our action on behalf of social justice in the world. As a regular practice, Communion services are also not the answer, because the Eucharist is not something to be given out; it is the living, loving action of God in our lives. I begin with this crisis because I think it is already a reality in some parts of the world and, indeed, in some areas of the United States.

All who are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus are called to follow Jesus and to take up the challenges presented in the three conversations contained in the quoted passage from Luke. I would like to address specifically the question of vocations to the priesthood, while recognizing the importance of vocations to religious life, to the single life, and to marriage, and while appreciating the vital role these other vocations play in the life of the church.

## CONCERNS AND CONVICTIONS

These reflections are born of several concerns and convictions. My concerns grow out of the lessening number of priests and the aging of those serving as priests in most of our dioceses today. I am concerned



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## Some priests do not foster vocations to the priesthood because of the painful and unfortunate polarizations in the church and the discouragement they experience

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about priests today bearing the burden of ministry yet remaining healthy, hopeful, and enthusiastic in a time that can seem discouraging and overwhelming. And I am concerned for the future of the church and the availability of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is at the heart of our identity as Catholic people. Everything else we do—from running soup kitchens to providing religious education to mounting efforts on behalf of justice and peace—begins and ends in the Eucharist. Herein lies the critical call for vocations to the priesthood today.

I bring several convictions to these concerns, based on my twenty-seven years of priestly ministry in seminary work as a spiritual director, in diocesan work in ministry to priests and priest personnel, and in parish work as pastor of a large suburban congregation. I believe in lay ministry, and I value the presence and apostolate of religious and of permanent deacons. I believe in collaboration and teamwork as a promising approach to the varied and extensive work of a parish in the church today. But I hold to the conviction that priesthood is essential to the future of the church and vital to parish life. As already stated, I hold to the conviction that the Eucharist is absolutely central to our identity and our nourishment as Catholic people. I constantly emphasize the importance of Sunday Eucharist in my parish, and I find that it is essential for priests to be welcoming, joyous, and personable within the various circles of parish life today. I address the question of vocations to the priesthood within the present discipline of the church, which calls for men committed to living the celibate life as candidates for the priesthood today. Finally, I hold to the conviction that celibacy is a gift and a grace in the church.

Before I proceed, let me acknowledge that there can be objections to what I wish to address concerning vocations, because there are thinking people in the church who say that there would not be a shortage of vocations to the priesthood if the church would not restrict priesthood to celibate men. The fact remains, however, that the church today upholds the present discipline, and I simply wish to address that reality.

Much of what is happening in our present-day society and culture immerses people in a preoccupation with themselves and in a view of this world as an end in itself. The anti-institutional bias among many people young and old, the value-deprived prevalence of sexual activity, the narcissism and materialism that consume so many people, and the preoccupation with building bigger barns in which to store one's money and one's goods are all factors that militate against an appreciation of the transcendent dimension of human life and that work against a life that reaches for the ideal of living for others and for God. Driving on the average highway today provides ample evidence of a "me first and me only" mentality.

### INVITATION AND URGENCY

Jesus has three conversations in the cited passage from Luke. Two are initiated by individuals who meet Jesus along the road. One is initiated by Jesus. Each conversation contains an invitation and has urgency. I think that these two characteristics remain true in the church today. Jesus continues to invite us to follow him. I do not think that young men today lack generosity or are devoid of spirituality. I do not think that God has ceased to call men to the priesthood. But I do think that it is very hard for them to hear God's call and to respond because of the culture and society in which they are enmeshed.

In addition to the invitation in which Jesus says to those he meets along the way, there is also clearly an urgency to his words. "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. . . . Let the dead bury their dead; come away and proclaim the Kingdom of God. . . . Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the Reign of God." In Luke 12:49 the urgency is unmistakable: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already."

Parental encouragement and healthy family life are an important beginning of vocations. The example, joyfulness, and willingness of priests in fostering vocations are a valuable source of vocations. Both parents and priests must examine their consciences in this regard. Parents bear a grave responsibility to foster vocations to the priesthood. Unfortunately, some parents discourage their sons from this way of



life for fear they will not be “happy” or “successful” or because they disagree with one or another of the church’s teachings. This is a critical issue for the future of vocations. And some priests do not foster vocations to the priesthood because of the painful and unfortunate polarizations in the church and the discouragements they experience. At the heart of a vocation is not what is happening or not happening, what is allowed or not allowed in the church at any given time. At the heart of a vocation is the call of God, the voice of Christ, which continues to contain an invitation and an urgency. Both parents and priests might focus on this in fostering vocations.

## CURRENT TRENDS

It remains hard for young men to hear and to respond to God’s call, despite their generosity and good will. Two trends stand out in candidates for the priesthood today. First, many of them come from families that have experienced much turmoil and instability. I state this as a description of their situation, not as a judgment upon them, although this has important implications for the maturing of their vocations. Some seek in the church the stability and certainty that they have not found in their family of origin or their religious training. Some are searching for a sense of themselves that they did not receive from their parents, especially their fathers. Many fathers were absent during their sons’ formative years because of divorce, alcoholism, or economic pressures. This is reflected in the candidates’ lack of self-possession, self-confidence, and inner direction. It gets played out in their seeing priesthood as being about power rather than service and in their wanting to exercise authority while not dealing maturely with authority figures in their own lives.

The second trend prevalent in candidates today is a preoccupation with “doing their own thing.” This comes from the surrounding culture and society. Again, I state this as an observation rather than a judgment, but I do suggest that it has implications for priesthood. All ministry is Christ’s ministry. We share in the ministry of Christ. All ministry is other-centered. We make ourselves available to the spiritual needs of our people. All ministry is an immersion in the message and the mission of Christ. We need to rediscover the wisdom of dying to oneself and losing oneself in order to find oneself in Christ. A culture that emphasizes self-fulfillment does not prepare its members for ministry. A “me first” society does not help its members live the ideals of gospel love. And, suffice it to say, before you can burn out, you’ve got to be on fire.

Given all these present-day realities, I think we have many challenges before us and much work to do

in drawing vocations and in forming candidates for priesthood. I propose that we be proactive in fostering vocations by providing the context for young men to hear the call and to develop the inner strength and clarity to respond to it.

## FINDING GOD VIA DISPLACEMENT

I realize that the question of vocations is a complex one today and that many factors influence call and response. I also recognize that formation personnel face a host of challenges in preparing candidates for priestly life. My purpose in writing this article is to raise some possibilities for assisting young men to listen to God’s presence and invitation in their lives. Surely, at the heart of a meaningful and peaceful life is the conviction that one is living one’s life in response to God’s will as one discerns it. Given the surrounding culture and society, I fear there is little opportunity or incentive to do this. Thus, if we are to nurture vocations, we must provide this opportunity.

I offer a simple suggestion that comes through my experience of organizing and conducting retreats in Assisi, the birthplace of Saint Francis. Since 1990 I have been involved in two retreats for priests and three retreats for laypeople and men and women religious for six days in Assisi. There is something about a pilgrimage that can be an occasion of grace. Displacing oneself, leaving what is familiar and comfortable, letting go for the sole purpose of finding God are dimensions of pilgrimage that can bear great fruit in a person’s life. I have seen it happen many times in the more than four hundred people who have journeyed to Assisi for a retreat. While I find Assisi to be a special place of grace and peace, given the charism of enthusiasm and joy lived there by Francis and Clare, what I am proposing is hardly limited to that location.

One might go on pilgrimage to a place of Marian devotion, for example. Surely, Mary is an invaluable source of inspiration and grace for anyone discerning a vocation. A pilgrimage to a mission territory where the gospel is being preached to those who live in circumstances of poverty or deprivation, or where the gospel work of justice and peace is being enfolded, would serve to lift young people out of their own enclosed world. A pilgrimage need not be to a distant land to be effective. Yet a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where Jesus preached and healed, or to Rome, where our rich Christian heritage can be discovered, has undeniable merit and appeal.

I see great value in inviting young men out of their culture and society in order to discern as well as to strengthen a vocation. In the first chapter of the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul



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**The more the young  
are able to reflect on  
the times in which they  
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discernment**

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II speaks about the complexities of present-day society and culture. He sees the importance of interpreting these times:

Such an interpretation is required because of the ambivalence and at times contradictions which are characteristic of the present situation, where there is a mixture of difficulties and potentialities, negative elements and reasons for hope, obstacles and alternatives, as in the field mentioned in the Gospel, where good seeds and weeds are both sown and “coexist” (cf. Matt. 13:24ff.).

It is not always easy to give an interpretive reading capable of distinguishing good from evil or signs of hope from threats. In the formation of priests it is not sufficient simply to welcome the positive factors and to counteract the negative ones. The positive factors themselves need to be subjected to a careful work of discernment, so that they do not become isolated and contradict one another, becoming absolutes and at odds with one another. The same is true for the negative factors, which are not to be rejected *en bloc* and without distinction, because in each one there may lie hidden some value which awaits liberation and restoration to its full truth.

For a believer the interpretation of the historical situation finds its principle for understanding and its criterion for making practical choices in a new and unique reality, that is, in a Gospel discernment. This interpretation is a work that is done in the light and strength provided by the true and living Gospel, which is Jesus Christ, and in virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This interpretation of life and culture in light of the gospel of Christ forms the first agenda for pilgrimage, a preamble to seeking God. I suggest we make the rich resources of church personnel and Christian tradition available to our young people so that their pilgrimage can bear fruit. We may need to take our young people on more than one pilgrimage if stepping out of the flow of days is to be of benefit in the lives and the vocational choices of those we ask to consider a priestly vocation. The more they are able to reflect on the times in which they live, and the more they are able to understand their own backgrounds and the cultural influences they experience, the more they will gain the clarity and self-possession that is essential for vocational discernment today.

While they will return to their familiar surroundings and will need to live in and cope with their American environment, a pilgrimage affords them the opportunity to lift their heads above the fray, to open their hearts beyond the immediate and concrete of daily life, and to seek Christ, hear his call, and respond to the urgency of his invitation.

#### **PURPOSE OF PILGRIMAGE**

The purpose of pilgrimage is not service or social awareness. Service and social awareness are important. Some young people have a keen awareness of these; some do not. The purpose of pilgrimage is not simply to understand one's own upbringing and culture, though that is the first step. After this needed reflection, the purpose of pilgrimage is to meet God, appreciate God, and become immersed in God. This is precisely what Saint Francis did in the twelfth century, and it gave birth to his vocation—although he did not set out to go on a pilgrimage. He set out for the Crusades. While I will use him as an example because he has deeply influenced my own life, there are many saints we can raise up as models for our young people.

I think Francis has much to offer those discerning a vocation today. In the feudal society of his time, he was the son of a wealthy clothing merchant, who was himself part of the rising business class that would replace the noble class as power brokers. Francis was young, popular, and very much a product of his culture and time. His desire to go off and fight in the Crusades was very much in keeping with the tenor of the times.

He doesn't get very far on his way to becoming a knight when his sleep is disturbed by a voice that encourages him to evaluate his goals: “Why follow the servant instead of the Master?” Francis returns to Assisi and enters a period of repentance that leads to conversion and discernment.



He asks an important spiritual question: "Lord, what would you have me do?" Because he listens to the voice of God, his return to Assisi is itself a pilgrimage. He does what I am suggesting is the agenda of pilgrimage. He lifts his head above the fray; he opens his heart beyond the immediate and concrete of daily life; he seeks Christ, hears Christ's call, and responds to the urgency of the invitation.

We need to create an atmosphere in which young people can ask the right questions in the right context. As we identify candidates of promise, we should support their vocational discernment by sending them on pilgrimage wherever we think they can best be placed in order to seek God and as often as need be to support them in their discernment. Such an investment of time, personnel, and finances is a good investment for the future.

### IGNITING THE BLAZE

There is much to be done. Going on pilgrimage is only a beginning, though an important one. As young men seek to listen to the voice of Christ and respond to his call, they will need a lot of guidance and support to strengthen and clarify their discernment. Providing that is largely the work of seminary formation programs. But first we must capture the attention of the young and help them listen for the invitation to serve. We have a rich tradition to offer them in scripture, in the teachings of the church, in the spiritual giants of the past, in theology, and in pastoral practice. Our Holy Father John Paul II has offered strong, charismatic leadership to a generation of young people. We might capitalize on this and invite those who show promise for priestly service on a pilgrimage that is truly an adventure with God.

Jesus came to light a fire upon the earth. He still wishes that the blaze be ignited. I have absolutely no regrets about becoming a priest. I received a lot of encouragement and support in pursuing a vocation to the priesthood from family, from parish priests, from relatives and friends. The church has changed a great deal since I first thought of priesthood in the early sixties. I have had to change and grow in order to move

beyond disappointment and disillusionment and respond to God's continual call. And I have had to go on pilgrimage over the years to rediscover the roots of my vocation in Christ and to recommit myself to him. Perhaps if more parents and priests go on pilgrimage, they might lift their heads above the fray, open their hearts beyond the immediate and concrete, and focus on Christ, who is at the heart of every call and vocation. Then, with their encouragement and support, the young can do the same and can hear the voice of Christ above the cultural din that surrounds them: "The foxes have lairs, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. . . . Let the dead bury their dead; come away and proclaim the Kingdom of God. . . . Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the Reign of God."

Finally, the rich young man in chapter 10 of Mark's gospel typifies many young people today. He is sincere and is searching but he is encumbered by his culture and his society. He wants to know how to inherit eternal life. Jesus points out the basics, and the young man says he is already doing these things. Then Jesus invites him on a pilgrimage. He invites him to displace himself and come on a journey: "There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." We know he went away sad because he was so attached to what he had. What is really sad is that he missed the loving gaze of Christ. Had he appreciated that "Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him," he might have discovered his true vocation. A pilgrimage might have helped.



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# Midlife Infatuations

*Lynn M. Levo, C.S.J., Ph.D.*

**M**ary, a vowed religious for twenty-eight years, tells you that she has never felt more alive in her life and that she doesn't understand what is bothering you about her relationship with her friend, Don, a former client at the agency where Mary works. Mary shares with you that she and Don are very close, that they understand one another, care for and support one another. You are aware that they talk to or see each other daily. Mary is considering living alone and tells you that she "will let nothing interfere with [her] relationship with Don."

In recent years, in my roles as a therapist, a congregational leader, and a consultant to religious formation programs, I have become aware that a number of women and men religious and clergy are in relationships similar to the one described above. These relationships, best described as infatuations, are often accompanied by erotic feelings—and those who choose to act on those feelings enter into unethical relating and boundary violations. Some decide to leave the priesthood or religious life to pursue what they describe as a mature and loving personal relationship, often their first. For others, the relationship ends, leaving one or both persons with mixed and complex emotions to handle. For many, infatuation opens a door to living more fully and more honestly as they grow to experience

relationships as central to their life of love and celibacy.

Infatuated relationships are not to be ignored, dismissed, or acted on impulsively. Rather, the nature, purpose, dangers, and gift of such relationships need to be contemplated and understood. These very experiences invite us to a new awareness of who we are called to be, both individually and communally. By defining and then exploring the characteristics of infatuated relating, asking why men and women religious and clergy, especially in midlife, may be particularly vulnerable to this kind of relating, and assessing both the possible negative consequences and positive opportunities and invitations of such relating, we may wake up to the life we are currently living and to the reality at the foundation of that life: our call to love and to see ourselves as lovable.

## RECOGNIZING INFATUATED RELATING

Infatuation, usually described as a preview, foreshadowing, or beginning of the relational journey toward intimacy (see Thomas J. Tyrrell, *Urgent Longings*, and Evelyn and James Whitehead, *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy*), is often viewed as negative and is frequently associated with acting genitally. This initial impression is under-



standable, given the elements of erotic urgency, fantasy, and secrecy that generally accompany this type of relationship. In reality, infatuated relating is a complex process characterized by a fourfold structure that Tyrrell describes as

hunger and personal poverty, romantic illusion and subsequent disillusionment and withdrawal usually accompanied by intense feelings of embarrassment and isolation. Persons involved in infatuated relating feel an urgent longing for relief from the intense loneliness of the human journey . . . yearning for the warm, accepting connection with others that we call intimacy. It is not an experience that one chooses . . . rather infatuated persons are usually overtaken by their experience.

## SIGNS OF INFATUATION

Stuart W. Twemlow, M.D., and Glen O. Gabbard, M.D., authors of “The Lovesick Therapist” (in Glen O. Gabbard, ed., *Sexual Exploitation in Professional Relationships*) delineate the following basic characteristics and underlying dynamics of infatuated relating:

**Emotional Dependence.** What often appears to be love is in fact an intense need for another that is so great that the infatuated person will do virtually anything to be in the presence of his or her chosen one—a need similar to an alcoholic’s dependence on alcohol. In essence, all reality becomes subservient to the intense emotional dependency experienced in the relationship. If these intense feelings are reciprocal, the individual experiences happiness that approaches ecstasy. If the feelings are not reciprocal, or if the person experiences even slight rejection, he or she may become depressed or possibly even contemplate self-inflicted harm or suicide. It is important to realize that these relationships need not involve genital interaction and that if the friendship is between two persons of the same sex, the impetus for the relationship may be more about emotional dependence than about same-sex relating.

**A Sense of Incompleteness.** Closely related to emotional dependence is a sense of not being a whole human being without the other member of the dyad. Individuals seek a sense of fusion with the other, and explain that the other helps them to feel complete. Frequent daily contact via telephone or visits is quite common and can bring great personal and financial costs upon the individuals involved.

**Idealization of the Other.** Infatuated individuals tend to idealize their partner, even naming and defending some negative characteristics of the other

as positive and/or apologizing for the other. They tend to make such statements as “He/she did not mean to be so rude; it’s just that he/she is tired” rather than admit that the other person is indeed rude or disrespectful of others at times.

**Intrusive Thinking.** When individuals are infatuated they often find they can think of little else than the other. Most of their waking hours are occupied by intrusive thoughts, often including fantasies of an idealized other, reflecting a considerable denial of reality or projection of desired qualities onto the loved one. One person in the dyad may see the other as a caring, sensitive person, when in reality the caring and sensitivity are what is both yearned for and rarely experienced from the other.

**Physical Sensations.** Infatuated relating can awaken the senses, and thus a variety of physical sensations may be experienced, even when just thinking about the other. A feeling of “walking on air” is common, sometimes accompanied by a pounding pulse, dry mouth, trembling in the hands and legs, and even giddiness—all characteristics seen in adolescent relating.

**Altered State of Consciousness.** Infatuated people experience an altered state of mind often described as dreamlike. They feel swept away into a romantic state of consciousness, and some report acting in uncanny ways.

**Impaired Decision Making.** When infatuated, individuals who are usually careful, rational, and even controlling tend to suspend their ordinary judgment, make uncharacteristic decisions, and take extraordinary risks. Typical responses include impulsive decisions about what matters at a given moment (e.g., deciding that work responsibilities are secondary to being with the other), about making commitments to the other, or about leaving ministry or the congregation—especially if the relationship is threatened in any way, either by the significant other or someone in authority.

**Risk Taking and Responsiveness to What Others Think.** For some individuals, the socially unacceptable nature of their relationship adds increased risk and intensifies their excitement and dedication to one another. If one person is married, a vowed religious, or ordained, his or her very unavailability, perhaps experienced as forbidden, can intensify longings—as also might a friend’s or superior’s raising questions about the nature and appropriateness of the relationship or threatening it in any way.



## WHY SO VULNERABLE?

In a culture like ours, which is so functional, alienating, and lacking in intimacy, most persons are at risk of infatuated relating. Although the following factors are present in many persons' lives today, vowed religious and clergy are particularly at risk because more of these factors are likely to be present in religious life and priesthood as currently lived in many cultures:

*A lack of awareness of who they learned to be*, especially because of the impact of not receiving the love they feel they needed or deserved in childhood. Many who enter religious life or priesthood seek to receive affirming responses from others, to be loved and idealized by others, and to be told that they are special, often to make up for lacks in their childhood experiences (see Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*). When persons lack awareness of what did not happen for them earlier in life (e.g., perhaps they did not experience appreciation and affection), they may not see others as other; they may blur self with other, and thus may meet their own needs through the other. They are less likely to relate in mutual ways and to maintain personal and professional boundaries, according to Peter Rutter, M.D., author of *Sex in the Forbidden Zone*. A mutual sympathy may develop, rather than compassion (the ability to feel with another but not take on the other's beliefs and feelings).

*A tendency to deny human needs and to spiritualize in the face of difficulties*. With all the emphasis on self in Western cultures, it is still surprising to hear how many men and women religious and clergy live unbalanced lives, frequently overemphasizing work and not attending to such basic human needs as intimacy (the ability to be oneself, without masks, and to be mutual) and self-care. The unbalanced life, frequently focused on work, often triggers or adds to the identity questions that normally occur for persons in midlife. Praying harder will not take the place of facing human needs and discerning one's heart's desires.

*A dualistic way of thinking that encourages "either/or" rather than "both/and" thinking*. Many persons have learned to intellectualize and to rationalize—to live from the neck up—and can be overwhelmed, confused, and unprepared to deal with the bodily sensations and the feelings that accompany attraction and infatuated relating. There is a tendency in most of us to want to limit these types of relating to adolescence and to not see and understand them as a legitimate, although often painful, part of adult development. Because of the prevailing splitting of spirituality and sexuality, we almost never see that infatuated relating can be an integral part of one's psychological and spiritual development.

*Mobility, change, and lack of long-standing relationships* can result in a lack of intimacy in one's life, along with an increased vulnerability to infatuated relating. Often, change and mobility are accompanied by isolation, putting one at risk for "falling in love." In addition, the relationship losses that frequently accompany the middle years, especially the death of a significant other (parent, mentor, friend), tend to be accompanied by loneliness—the primary feeling of persons at risk for infatuated relating. An invitation and opportunity to share these feelings and experiences can touch the very core of anyone.

*Lack of the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to live in a mutual and life-giving manner*. Many vowed religious and clergy live busy lives, with little time to reflect on and know themselves or their deepest desires and motivations. Intimacy with self—the knowledge, love, and care of self developed through reflection and action—is necessary if one is to "be oneself" with others and to experience intimacy with others. Even today, community and seminary training in some cases still does not provide persons with the awareness of or opportunity to learn and practice the necessary skills for adult mutual living (e.g., self-disclosure, straight talk, how to challenge and affirm, how to deal with conflict). We need to grow in awareness and acceptance of the truth that we need skills to live celibacy well, as Martin Pable points out in a recent *Review for Religious* article. Is our current experience inviting us to see that our asceticism will be in the area of relational skill development?

## PITFALLS AND POSSIBILITIES

Will all instances of infatuated relating lead to boundary violations or other destructive consequences? Do all infatuations end in a change in one's way of life? Is it possible to develop a mature, healthy adult relationship out of a relationship that began with infatuation? Can infatuated relationships be an opportunity for grace and growth, both for the individuals involved and for their communities?

Let us not be naive; the possibility of exploiting another exists in each of us. We cannot ignore the potential for harm that can result when either personal or professional boundaries are crossed. There is much evidence to suggest that at times persons disregard their professional and ethical codes especially by seeing them as unjust or unduly repressive. The resulting boundary violations leave lasting scars and can greatly affect another's lifelong ability to trust.

Even without professional boundary violations, there are potentially serious consequences and/or missed growth opportunities for the vowed religious or clergy who finds himself or herself in an infatuated



relationship and fails to recognize, examine, and learn from the experience:

- One may suffer a decreased ability to discern what is real and unreal in oneself and others, including personal strengths and weaknesses—the self-knowledge essential for healthy self-esteem and mutual relating.
- With the blurring of self with another, a person is likely not to see the need for union with a hidden part of oneself (what C. J. Jung calls the shadow). The person may either idealize in another an aspect of self that he or she is called to develop and share, or condemn others for the very behaviors he or she engages in or inflicts on others.
- The person may not face his or her aloneness—another capacity essential for the development of true intimacy and mutual loving—and may instead use another to mitigate loneliness.
- When a person falls in love, he or she may mistake the messenger for the message: a call to love, to see oneself as lovable, and to grow and change within one's current way of life (singleness, marriage, religious life, priesthood). A person may be being called to change how he or she is currently living life, not necessarily to change his or her way of life.

Infatuations offer an opportunity to learn much about ourselves and others—valuable life lessons that can perhaps be learned only through such experiences. First, infatuations invite us to trust in and learn from our experience and to believe that God does indeed speak to us in our life circumstances, especially in and through one another. What if we believed that there are no mistakes and that such relationships are indeed invitations to become more whole, more fully human?

Second, sexual energy experienced in an infatuated relationship can be an invitation to realize more fully that we are relational beings, called to find authentic humanness not in isolation but in relationship. Infatuated relating calls us to other-centeredness and may be the beginning of a clearer understanding of the relationship-centered spirituality modeled and called for by Jesus. In addition, these types of relationships are often messy, disturbing, unpredictable, and filled with body awareness and a range of feelings. Consequently, persons who have experienced infatuation can become more in touch with their own and others' embodiedness and vulnerability and are offered an opportunity to develop the capacity for integration and compassion. Finally, for congregational leaders and bishops, community members, and friends, infatuated relating invites and even demands mutuality.

## IMPORTANCE OF MUTUALITY

Who can best walk with a person who is in an infatuated relationship, and how? What awareness, attitudes, and skills are needed to be helpful? Accompaniment is an art related to being. Mutuality is a way of being with another that involves the capacity to receive, with respect and understanding, the reality of another and to offer to the other another reality—your own. It includes exchanges (not one-sided conversations) characterized by self-disclosure and empathy, challenge (not limited to confrontation) and examination of challenge, and discussion of how the two persons are with one another—what Evelyn Woodward, author of *Poets, Prophets, and Pragmatists*, calls “you and me talk.” Being mutual can be a helpful and even necessary way of walking with another, especially as that person reflects on and examines his or her relational life.

First, it is important to assess what, if any, professional boundary violations are occurring. Because such transgressions need to be addressed quickly in order to prevent further violations and ongoing abuse, the opportunity to engage in the complex and often slow process of mutuality may be limited. When violations of professional boundaries are not involved, the process of mutuality can be very helpful.

Assessing where the person is in the relationship and determining the current stage and structure of the infatuated relationship now provide important clues regarding what to expect and how to be helpful. It is easier to talk about any relationship, especially an infatuated one, in its beginning stages, and if the person has some awareness of self that includes his or her relationship history and the awakened hunger for connection he or she may be experiencing. At this point, telling and hearing stories, the exchange of self-disclosure, and empathy can be most helpful. A willingness to disclose details about one's own relational journey and to listen empathically and respectfully can help the other to honestly name and look at his or her relational history, and particularly the infatuation. This kind of exchange helps infatuated people clarify who they are and where they are in their life journey (i.e., their identity), as well as to examine what choices they are making and whether those choices indeed fit with who they say they are (i.e., their integrity). Identity and integrity are major midlife questions that are more honestly addressed with another.

If a person is well into an infatuation, filled with romantic illusion, and feeling alive and energized by the relationship—and if they are also not very self-aware, or perhaps even blind to their personal reality—the



attempt to be mutual will be more challenging, if not impossible. To understand what this person is experiencing, one must realize that he or she is like a person who has been starving for a period of time, perhaps years, and now is being offered something to eat. When one's life is being saved, it does not matter what the "food" looks like. It is almost impossible for this person to hear that what he or she experiences as life-giving is possibly not good or healthy for them. As John Money notes in *Love and Lovesickness*, those who try to engage this person in analytical conversation about the relationship should expect defensiveness and an inability or unwillingness to examine the relationship; they will be pushed away and seen as "the enemy." The major challenge for one who seeks to help the infatuated person at this point is how to be seen not as someone "sitting across the table," the opposition or the enemy, but as someone who is "sitting on the same side of the table," looking with that person at his or her life's journey and the significance of this particular relationship in that journey.

Respecting the individual and his or her journey is essential and vital in any helpful conversations, as is preparing the ground for challenge by building a trusting relationship. How often does challenge fail because there has not been a sufficiently established trusting relationship that can then sustain the stretching that challenge demands? To offer challenge in such a way that it can be heard and can make a difference is an essential skill—really an art—that must be learned and used to build any type of real community.

Most infatuated relationships end; the fire eventually burns out. To change the nature of the relationship—that is, to transform it into a mature, mutual adult relationship—both persons involved would need to become more aware of their own individuality (individuation). Because difficult feelings usually accompany the later stages of an infatuation, persons may choose to end the relationship and at the same time continue their journey to individuation.

When people are in the final phases of an infatuation, dealing with either disillusionment or withdrawal, in addition to respect and reverence for their story, they most likely need help and support in cop-

ing with their feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, and depression. The person who knows these feelings from having dealt with them in his or her own life is better equipped to walk empathically with someone as the infatuation unravels and ends.

No matter where the person is in this relational journey, patience and a willingness to let the other experience and live out the infatuated relationship are both essential and challenging. Most of us don't like messiness and mistakes. Attempts to ward off the problems and pain by urging the termination of the relationship will not only fail but may prove detrimental to the person and his or her journey, as well as to that person's relationship with the friend or helper. Can we be learners together—people who live with some trial-and-error, finding out how to live and love by going through these experiences imperfectly? Exploring infatuated relationships—our own and those of others—can help affirm the relational values and life that accompany such relating. Infatuations also call clergy, members of religious congregations and persons in leadership to challenge one another to greatness—to be all that they are called to be: aware, human, alive, just, and above all, loving.

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# Succeeding and Failing

*James Torrens, S.J.*

## *Penelope at the Loom*

Here at my life's work  
I'm toiling against suitors  
who will lay claim to me  
when I get it right.

I'd like some masterstroke,  
I cannot deny it,  
the accomplished life,  
though it turn me smug.

But mercy comes along,  
laborless night  
with unseen fingers  
undoing what's contrived.

In the frown of morning  
successes pale.  
Shall I recommence  
with the raveled thread?

Today tells me no.  
Today says the awaited spouse,  
who'll be at the door,  
desires me empty-handed.

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America (October 17, 1998).*

**A** dedicated life, no less than any other, is subject to the fluctuations of success and failure. Success in one's role—whether teacher, pastor, help giver, parent, even child—brings a light to the eyes. It supplies zip. One wakes up ready to start the day. In our mission to realize God's plan, the kingdom, and to embody God's love, nothing keeps us going like some indications of success. The success is God's, really, but we get to share it—and that can turn a long, hard day into a worthwhile one.

One index of success, though not the only one and not entirely reliable, is appreciation. Appreciation means not just success pure and simple, but success in somebody's eyes. Other-directed people, to use that old but useful category of David Riesman, always have a butterfly in the stomach, an anxiety about how they will appear. They can never quite get enough applause. Still, a person normally concerned with doing right and with serving God well finds support and confirmation in appreciative remarks and remains a bit at sea without them.

Ex-mayor Ed Koch of New York, as a humorous political gambit, used to ask his constituency, "How am I doing? (Answer expected: "Fine.") Today our weights and measures have become more finely quantified, and the measuring process more



obligatory. White- and blue-collar workers have to submit yearly to some kind of performance assessment. And teachers, needing to exercise their students in evaluation constantly, have to undergo this same dread ordeal from the subjects of their activity—have to ask them, with an array of questions that have a spectrum of possible answers, “How am I doing?”

The jury is still out on whether student evaluation is a reality test or a popularity test. My years of college teaching gave me a healthy respect for the perceptiveness and generous judgment of most students; still, the results were not always easy on me. I fortunately had department chairs who could handle their stage of the process with sensitivity, highlighting the positive and simply putting the negative on the table. Further up the ladder, however, the results came before deans and vice presidents, to be scanned with less nuance.

This experience of success or failure—a pat on the back, a report card with pluses and minuses, an employer’s frown—occupies an enormous psychic space. It threads through our biographies. A negative assessment, except among the most balanced (or most insouciant) of people, is bound to elicit anger, provoke depression, or both. Genuine compliments, especially in writing, come much more rarely than they ought to.

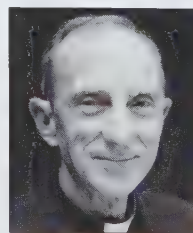
How hard it is among peers—fellow team members, members of the same religious order—to convey a negative judgment in a positive, helpful, and attentive way. And how hard, in our bureaucracies major or minor, for persons in authority to stand up for their own when those folks merit a defense against a narrow critique. The evaluation of success and failure to which the educational and professional milieu now exposes us leaves a crisscross of scars upon all but the most mature.

What I think I see, looking back from the giddy perspective of golden jubilee in a religious order, is that both success and failure can be catastrophic or providential. It’s what the Holy Spirit helps us do in each case—that is, how we respond to the lows and highs—that makes the difference. How many fair-haired boys and class sweethearts have been ruined by adulation? How much injury or rejection or sheer misadventure, on the other hand, has become a turning point for good in the world’s most encouraging biographies?

We know plenty of people, not excluding religious ones, permanently soured by setbacks. It is hard not to be. Superiors, supervisors, or systems that may be to blame bear much of the responsibility but by no means all if it. On the other hand, those who emerge with faith and love from abusive or neglectful families or impossible working conditions, to say nothing of their own obsessions or limitations, will shine in heaven. They will have learned from the rabbi who walked the way of the cross.

It is right for us to hope for a strong impact on our surroundings and to wish an enthusiastic response to our words and deeds. Blessed are those who achieve highly and are not carried away by it. The ego, however, is mighty tricky, and gradual success in one’s vocation and mission and life, including a dawning awareness of one’s real gifts and one’s limitations, seems the most salutary. Of course, blessed are those in whom God’s workings encounter no resistance from the start and produce a hundredfold, but the field seems normally to need a lot of sweat and work. Our own Master had the roof fall in on him before the final vindication.

We were not really put on this earth to produce a balance sheet of success or accomplishment, even for the kingdom. “We are not divine providence,” a pope found himself having to admit. Waiting—not idleness but active expectation—is our real task, our vocation. The second letter to Timothy defines true followers of the Lord as “those who have longed for his appearing” (4:8). That is the drift of my poem “Penelope at the Loom,” with a nod to Homer’s *Odyssey*. As we labor to do well, and are encouraged in our labors, and taste the savor of a goal achieved, every hindrance and frustration and slowdown and incapacity can play a providential role, reminding us who, and of Whom, we really are.



Father James Torrens, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.



# The Borderline Minister

*Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.*

**T**he pastor of a suburban parish was called to a meeting with the chancellor of the diocese to discuss a formal request for the diocese to sponsor a new order of women religious. The written request, signed by a Sister Joan, noted that the pastor “has helped us discern the Lord’s will for us to be formally recognized in this diocese and has offered to support us spiritually and financially.” The chancellor wanted to know what the pastor’s experience had been with Sister Joan, and he was most curious about the “offer” of financial support. Over the past year, two other pastors had complained that a Sister Joan was actively seeking benefactors in their parishes.

The suburban pastor was surprised to learn of Sister Joan’s claims and was unaware that other pastors had filed complaints about the same person. While it was true that she had told him about her desire to establish a religious congregation with a ministry directed to sexually abused women, the pastor had merely listened empathically and shown interest; he had made no commitments. He knew little about Sister Joan except that she was on leave from her religious order to “heal the wounds” of her sexual abuse and gender identity issues. He also knew that the three other women involved in the plan to form a new congregation were people she had met in a sexual abuse support group. While he was somewhat taken

aback by Joan’s clinging and neediness, he was deeply moved by her story: she had left home to escape repeated sexual abuse and joined a religious order at age 18, only to be ‘victimized’ sexually for years by an older nun who had been her spiritual director. Some two weeks before his meeting with the chancellor, the pastor had reluctantly agreed to consider Joan’s request that he serve as their unofficial chaplain while they were in the process of discerning their future. He had denied her request to house her group in an unused section of the parish rectory. She was gravely disappointed and tearful over his decision. In parting, she remarked that she was on her way to a seven-day directed retreat.

The chancellor was also concerned about another matter, involving the divorced laywoman who served as coordinator of Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) programs. Even though she had excellent credentials and had come highly recommended to this diocesan position, her performance over the past two years had been lackluster at best. She had the annoying habit of being either absent from or late for diocesan meetings and appointments—even for a meeting with the bishop. Furthermore, she was inconsistent in meeting deadlines as well as in supervising her staff. Her first year’s performance appraisal was below average, but her contract was renewed



after she made an impassioned appeal to her boss, the diocesan administrator, citing the death of her grandmother as an extenuating circumstance. He agreed to renew her contract if she made a commitment to undergo regular coaching with him. The coaching turned out to be an ordeal for him. Recently, quite by coincidence, he had learned that the reason she had received positive references from her previous diocese was that "they wanted to get her out before she caused any more trouble." Apparently, she had been asked to resign after losing her temper at a budget meeting and screaming at the bishop that if he really cared about her and her program, he wouldn't cut her budget. Equally disturbing, the director of family ministries of that diocese reported that he and his family were being "stalked" by the woman. She had made late-night crank calls to his home and had threatened to spread rumors that he was having an affair with her. A shy and retiring man, he had been embarrassed by the attention she had lavished on him. The harassment had begun after he had rejected her offer to be his "soul mate" and turned down her request that he divorce his wife and marry her.

## **BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DYNAMICS**

In both instances, the diocese was contending with a phenomenon called borderline personality disorder. Found more commonly in women than in men, borderline behavior is characterized by emotional instability and relational extremes. Unfortunately, this personality pattern is becoming increasingly present and troublesome in religious settings. Appearing emotionally stable at one moment, the borderline individual can suddenly become intensely angry, depressed, anxious, or questioning in regard to identity, goals, and values. Impulsive, unpredictable, and intense verbal outbursts and threats, as well as physical displays of temper or self-damaging acts, including suicide attempts and self-mutilation, are features of this personality. Surprisingly, the borderline person's emotional lability tends to be short-lived. Afterward, he or she calms down and tends to behave as if nothing unusual has happened. Characteristically unstable in relationships, borderline individuals sometimes overidealize another person, viewing that individual as incapable of any wrong—yet when frustrated with that person, they instantly devalue him or her.

Borderline individuals have an intense fear of being alone, because when they are alone they feel empty and worthless. They can be clinging and dependent, demanding that others should meet all their unmet needs. When others are unable or unwilling to

fulfill their exaggerated expectations, borderline people may become enraged. Nevertheless, these individuals can be creative, intelligent, and emotionally perceptive and can function at high levels when expectations are clear and structured.

The borderline personality seems to be increasing as a diagnostic entity, probably because of an increase in family instability during the past three decades. This disorder tends to be exceedingly common in individuals with a history of severe physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse or other severe childhood traumas. A number of comorbid conditions, such as eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse, depression, and chronic suicidal ideation and gestures, commonly accompany this personality disorder.

On the basis of this description, religious leaders will immediately recognize and identify borderline individuals on their ministry team or in their organization. A smaller religious community may have one borderline minister, while larger ones are likely to have several. Even one person with this disorder can negatively impact the entire organization.

With their emphasis on love and acceptance, religious organizations can expect to attract individuals who struggle with feelings of emptiness and isolation. Initially, a borderline personality may appear guarded in such a setting. As the organization persists in offering love and acceptance, however, the borderline minister forms intense attachments. He or she may give glowing testimony to the group's concern and hospitality, and group members will predictably respond by giving even more of themselves. As the demands of the borderline personality increase, the organization begins to feel controlled, manipulated, or trapped, and predictably withdraws from the individual. In response to what the borderline minister perceives as rejection and the possible loss of the relationship, he or she may offer to do anything or accept nearly any humiliation or abuse to save the relationship and avoid the dread and pain of rejection. In anticipation of the threat of rejection, borderlines utilize a variety of defensive psychological maneuvers, particularly the primitive defense of "splitting." Because they have difficulty tolerating both negative and positive feelings for the same person, they tend to view others as either all good or all bad. Not surprisingly, those deemed "bad" become targets for their emotional outbursts.

Overwhelming personal charm is another defense they utilize. To win and maintain emotional support, they may lavish others with gifts, time, or praise. Similarly, borderline females may use flattery or seductiveness to secure the attention of male leaders or those who are otherwise influential in the religious organization. When others do not respond as they



expect, borderlines experience feelings of abandonment and worthlessness.

How does this personality develop? The borderline minister frequently has a history of childhood abuse and trauma; the mother is often absent, neglectful, or in other ways emotionally unavailable or unpredictable. As a result, the child does not develop a secure sense of the mother as a good and caring figure. For the borderline, good and bad feelings have not been integrated. The normal process of development allows a child to experience both the positive and the negative, but the borderline person does not have this integrative experience. Subsequently, rage remains unmitigated by love, and in the face of emotional turmoil, other people are perceived as either all good or all bad.

The borderline minister tends to feel, "I don't know who I am or where I'm going," and so has identity problems involving self, gender, career, and basic values. This person's view of the world is, "People are great; no, they are not. Having goals is good; no, it is not. If life doesn't go my way, I can't tolerate it." The basic life strategy becomes, "Keep all options open. Don't commit to anything. Reverse roles and vacillate in thoughts and feelings when under attack." The parental threat internalized by the borderline personality in childhood was, "If you grow up and leave me, bad things will happen to me."

## SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS

Predictably, borderline ministers tend to be as confused about the nature and presence of God as they are about their own identity and purpose in life. Not surprisingly, they have difficulty maintaining constancy in their spiritual lives. They are likely to view God as "all good" and themselves as "all bad." As such, they have difficulty dealing with their feelings toward God. Not surprisingly, their image of God can be as variable as their moods. When they are elated, God is imagined as kindly and beneficent, but when they are angry and depressed, God is imagined as a tyrant and the source of all their problems. Because of their propensity to project blame outside themselves, borderline ministers harbor rageful thoughts and feelings against God and their religious organization—but are extremely hesitant to admit that they harbor such thoughts and feelings.

Normally mild-mannered, higher-functioning borderline ministers are occasionally observed engaging in vengeful behaviors, such as vitriolic character assassinations or summarily firing a parish council member over what others would consider a trivial matter. What accounts for such un-Christian actions? James Masterson, M.D., who has studied the moral

## Unfortunately, the borderline personality disorder is becoming increasingly present and troublesome in religious settings

thinking process and behaviors of borderline individuals, indicates that they utilize the "talion principle" in guiding their moral behavior. This principle, also known as *lex talionis*, is the principle of retributive justice based on the Mosaic law of "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth". This revengeful moral code, which is more primitive than the Christian moral code of forgiveness, is consistent with the primitive splitting defense so characteristic of this personality disorder. In the movie *Fatal Attraction*, the borderline character played by actress Glenn Close "gets even" with the lover who rejects her (played by Michael Douglas) by pouring acid on his car, disclosing their affair to his wife, and cooking his daughter's pet rabbit on the family's stove.

Needless to say, borderline ministers have difficulty with the Christian concept of forgiveness. The profound implications of this avenging belief with regard to the borderline minister's participation in both psychotherapy and spiritual direction are discussed later in this article.

Borderline ministers typically use spiritual discipline in a self-centered fashion. Their prayer becomes a tool for getting God's attention, and tends to focus on petition: "Oh, God, get me that pastorate so I can really love you," or "God, make the pastor care as much about me as I do about him." In a childlike fashion, these individuals may make all kinds of promises in the hope of getting their prayers answered. Crushed when their prayers go unanswered, they conclude that they will never be acceptable and lovable in God's eyes. God hates them, they contend, because unanswered prayers mean that God has rejected them.

Furthermore, their spiritual perception is greatly dependent on relational experiences with others. To the extent to which borderline ministers regularly



experience rejection, they find it difficult if not impossible to tolerate a relationship with God. Predictably, they idealize a bishop, provincial, or district administrator as a kindly, loving substitute father figure. However, when the idealized individual fails to live up to the dysfunctional minister's private expectations or exhibits some minor shortcoming, the idealized individual becomes the target of the minister's rage and is immediately devalued. Because borderline individuals have not learned to integrate opposite perceptions and feelings such as love and hate, they are perpetually in turmoil—a state that affects most others around them.

Relatively healthy religious groups and organizations have the potential to be the instrument of deep healing for the borderline minister. For it is only in a sustained and consistent atmosphere—a “holding environment” of love and concern—that borderline ministers can ever be able to experience God's love in a constant way. The challenge, of course, is for religious organizations to set realistic limits for such ministers and maintain these limits in the face of the borderline's instability. Unfortunately, there are relatively few seminaries, parishes, religious communities, or diocesan offices that can steadily provide the kind of environment that borderline ministers need. Unless these ministers (or ministers in training) are fortunate enough to have this sustained experience, it is unlikely that they will achieve a sufficient degree of healing and wholeness to function adequately in most ministries today.

It is for this reason that borderline individuals, even high-functioning ones, are a poor risk for ministry positions. They are likely to fail at all but the least stressful ministries, which are those that have minimal work expectations and deadlines, and even fewer interpersonal demands. Since the majority of ministry positions today are high-stress, high-demand positions that require considerable interpersonal skills, borderline ministers are a poor fit. Nevertheless, individuals with this disorder are attracted to ministry in the hope that religious life can make up for the early trauma and deprivations they experienced.

## SCREENING AND SELECTION

Three strategies are offered for dealing with borderline pathology in ministry personnel. The first strategy involves the screening and selection process. The basic question screening committees must answer is, Will we knowingly accept and encourage impaired individuals to enter professional ministries? The fact of the matter is that borderline individuals, even if they are high-functioning, are impaired.

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## Psychotherapy for the borderline minister can be either facilitated or hindered by concurrent spiritual direction

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According to Conrad Weiser, author of *Healers: Harmed and Harmful*, increasing numbers of high-functioning borderlines have joined religious organizations recently, and many more can be expected. While screening committees occasionally fail to recognize borderlines, they often knowingly admit these individuals out of kindness or desperation, or with the hope that they will somehow change. The financial and emotional costs of this decision are extremely high—not only to the religious organization, which is responsible for paying any legal fees, settlements, and fees for therapeutic treatment, but also to those who suffer emotional distress because they must live and work with these impaired ministers.

Weiser, among others, believes that individuals with borderline pathology do not belong in a religious profession. Since there are few candidates for the priesthood, screening committees may “gamble” by accepting higher-functioning borderlines for ordination. These committees fail to realize the degree of havoc caused by introducing borderlines into the already-troubled system.

Another reason to exclude borderline individuals from the ministry involves a range of moral and financial issues related to sexual abuse. There is mounting evidence that ministers who engage in sexual abuse tend to choose victims with borderline personalities. According to Weiser's data, ministerial sexual abuse often involves two individuals with severe personality disorders. The abusing minister tends to exhibit a borderline personality disorder or a low-functioning narcissistic personality disorder with borderline features. The victim tends to manifest a borderline personality disorder or a low-functioning dependent personality disorder with borderline features. Needless to say, adequate and extensive assessment and the willingness to exclude these candidates should be a priority.



## PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Until a few years ago, the prognosis for individuals with borderline pathology was considered guarded at best, even with interminable treatment. Clinical lore suggested that basic treatment consisted of intensive psychotherapy—and perhaps medication, hospitalization, and sometimes residential care—for a period of seven to eleven years. Now, because of specialized treatment protocols and strategies, the prognosis for treating the disorder is considered fair to good, given intensive treatment over a period of two to three years. Michael Stone, M.D., writing in *Abnormalities of Personality*, indicates that borderline personality disorder, like narcissistic and schizotypal disorders, has an intermediate level of treatability.

Stone's guarded optimism about the treatability of this disorder is premised on the treatment provider being a specialist in modifying borderline personality dynamics. It also assumes that the borderline patient is engaged in the treatment process. Many borderline patients who have been in therapy for years continue to act out with suicidal gestures and other parasuicidal behaviors. Clearly, these patients have not yet been engaged in the treatment process. For it is only after such individuals have sufficient motivation and commitment to change—and to stop the acting out and other suicidal gestures—that they can be said to be engaged in treatment. It is therefore incumbent on those who have financial responsibility for the treatment of borderline ministers to become informed consumers. This means recognizing the critical importance of identifying psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and inpatient and residential treatment programs with specialized training and competence in treating individuals with severe personality disorders. Also, because borderlines utilize splitting and other primitive defenses, competent treatment requires collaboration between the specialist and those who live and work with the borderline minister to neutralize and redirect these devastating defenses. In my opinion, if the treatment provider does not mention or initiate the need for such collaboration, another provider should probably be sought.

Psychotherapy for the borderline minister can be either facilitated or hindered by concurrent spiritual direction. The extent to which borderlines can be assisted in establishing constancy in their image of God, as well as in developing greater awareness of their talionic urges, can greatly facilitate the treatment process. Because of their primitive moral perspective, the drive to seek retribution for present and past rejections needs to be continually addressed, both inside and outside psychotherapy. The basic

choice that the borderline in treatment must face is between getting better and getting even. So much of borderline ministers' behavior bespeaks the message, "I won't budge for anybody," be it psychiatrist, spiritual director, bishop, local superior, or provincial. The spiritual director who is aware of this phenomenon will recognize the various manifestations of talionic urges.

Just as the borderline's primitive, retribution-based moral code is consistent with the primitive splitting defense, it is also related to the propensity to engage in projective identification. The latter occurs when such patients project negative elements of themselves onto naive therapists or spiritual directors, who unconsciously identify with what is projected and begin to feel or behave in a manner consistent with the projected element because of the interpersonal pressure from the patient. More experienced and self-aware therapists and directors deflect, confront, or process these projected negative elements, thereby avoiding this seductive dance.

Unfortunately, most people are unaware of this projective process and too easily become hooked into it. As long as needy or angry borderline ministers continue to demand that everyone must make up for the abuse, lack of nurturing, and trauma in their early life, they will continually hook their ministry peers, superiors, and spiritual directors into this projective process. Not surprisingly, this demand is rooted in their talionic moral belief system: they are entitled to avenge others—by getting others to nurture them, take care of them, and give them special dispensations—to make up for their perceived early losses.

They want to discuss psychotherapeutic issues in their spiritual direction sessions; they call unsuspecting colleagues in the middle of the night to talk about how bad they feel; they refuse to take part in community reconciliation activities because they are "too fragile." With borderline ministers, the basic task in psychotherapy, as well as in spiritual direction, is to confront their talionic code as inconsistent with Christian beliefs and to reframe their life's journey as getting on with life—meaning taking on the role of cocreator and forgiver—instead of getting even with life. Spiritual directors, religious administrators, and ministry colleagues who put up with borderlines' splitting, blaming, and projective identification are not helping them; they are reinforcing their pathology at great expense to all involved.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

The third strategy involves organizational interventions. Limit setting and ministry-team cohesiveness are two basic elements in containing border-

line pathology in religious organizations. Since borderlines have difficulty establishing boundaries and limits for themselves, others can and should help them set limits that are clear, realistic, consistent, enforceable, and promptly enforced. Limit setting usually involves three categories: persons, time, and things. For example, if the borderline minister has been known to verbally or physically assault parishioners or coworkers, a firm limit to reestablish basic respectfulness is needed. There obviously was no effective limit setting (or perhaps no limit setting at all) in the aforementioned case of the RCIA director who "stalked" a coworker.

If the borderline minister is routinely late for or absent from meetings, limits on time should be set. If the minister has a habit of misplacing, misusing, or failing to return others' personal or community property, limits must be set regarding such objects. Not to set limits "so as not to upset Sister" is not only foolhardy; it also robs the borderline minister of the opportunity to learn responsibility, respect, and consistency.

As manipulation and splitting are characteristic defenses for borderline individuals, these maneuvers need to be addressed systemically or organizationally. To the extent that a ministry team can function cohesively and communicate openly and effectively, the borderline minister's manipulations and splitting behaviors will have little negative effect on the team. Unfortunately, splitting has fragmented or even destroyed untold numbers of parish councils, pastoral ministry teams, and provincial and diocesan management teams. When an individual team member is told something in confidence or is asked to keep a communication privileged, team functioning may not be affected—but if a borderline minister is doing the telling or making the request, it will invariably affect team functioning. Therefore, whenever a member of a ministry team exhibits borderline behavior, the team must do everything in its power to avoid being manipulated or split. When a ministry team adopts the policy that all information shared individually by the borderline member will be shared with the entire team, splitting can be averted. However, when the borderline minister has established a

close relationship wherein another team member feels compelled to protect or rescue the borderline, the phenomenon of splitting may be impossible to neutralize without outside consultation.

## IMPACT USUALLY NEGATIVE

Borderline dynamics and pathology are increasingly common in ministry settings today. Whether this trend continues or not is largely in the hands of screening committees. Until it can be proved otherwise, borderline ministers should be considered impaired ministers. Depending on the degree of impairment, these individuals can be expected to have varying degrees of negative impact on the ministries in which they are involved. The prognosis for the psychiatric treatment of individuals with this severe personality disorder remains quite guarded, unless the minister is therapeutically engaged in the treatment process and treatment is provided by a skilled and experienced specialist. Finally, ministry teams and religious organizations that have been unsuccessful in dealing with borderline ministers' splitting may need to seek the help of an organizational consultant.

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# Flawed Communication Within Communities

*Mary Ann Flannery, V.S.C., Ph.D.*

**A**s managerial crises within communities escalate because of diminishing numbers of active religious, congregational leaders need to make a periodic audit of the communication styles used in reporting and handling these crises. In my experience as both a consultant and a researcher, I have observed that congregational leaders are all too often unaware that their communication strategies are simply not working. As a result, critical decisions are made without the input and support of the membership. From a psychosociological point of view, this is not unusual—but the situation clearly indicates a need for some changes in the communication styles of leaders. Otherwise, members will continue to feel helpless and voiceless as decisions are made. Core members will increasingly lose enthusiasm, and the mission of the congregation will be diminished significantly.

## COMMUNICATION SINCE VATICAN II

Prior to Vatican II, communication of change frequently took place after a significant decision had been autocratically made; the members of the congregation read about the change in a newsletter or a personal letter from the general superior. Even changes made by the congre-

gation's chapter were communicated in the same way.

Since Vatican II, however, growth in the understanding of human communication and its fecundity in the psychology of the person began to assert a positive influence. Since the early 1970s, communities have been inundated with questionnaires, reports, letters, and summaries of congregational issues. Attendance at congregational meetings has been nearly mandated for all members, and workshops and in-house gatherings have become required for the ongoing dissemination of information and the adaptation of policies and procedures in the congregation.

At first this all seemed healthy and exciting, but now the general perception is quite different. The communication styles of some congregational leaders appear to be stuck in the first wave of paradigm changes out of Vatican II. Meetings have become anathema, letters and reports go unread, and many religious have come to see the communication efforts of administrators as onerous burdens leveled on an already overworked membership. When such attitudes prevail, both leadership and congregation suffer a lack of the very mission of the church: the proclamation of the gospel.

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### **SPIRAL OF SILENCE**

The simple reaction to a declining response to communication from congregational administrators, especially regarding critical issues, should be that something needs retooling in the communication strategies; there is not necessarily something radically wrong with the membership or the leadership.

I suggest that efforts to revise communication strategies begin with an awareness of what German sociologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (in *Journal of Communication*) calls "the spiral of silence." Her seminal study of public opinion concluded that when individuals are inundated with information, they begin to align themselves with the most influential or vocal of the sources of information for fear of isolation. To the individual, Noelle-Neumann argued, not isolating oneself is more important than making one's own judgment. Noelle-Neumann took this concept as far as she could, saying that such is the condition of life in society. While I do not believe that this condition is innate in society, I do think it can be created if leadership is incapable of interactive communication.

Individuals find out the majority opinion by observing the social environment and the distribution of opinions for or against their own ideas. They may tire of the effort involved in sifting information and forming personal opinions, or they may distrust their own opinions as "not intelligent enough" or "not informed enough" and thus join the most frequently voiced opinion. Some may join a widely

distributed opinion out of friendship or loyalty to its proponents. For all these reasons and more, whenever a pervasively distributed opinion is accepted, it is possible that the spiral of silence has been the most influential force in creating "the majority."

Congregational decisions are often made at the point of listening to the most widely distributed and vocal opinions, but they run the risk of being delusory decisions. The hearts and souls of many individuals may not at all be there to provide the support the decision needs.

This phenomenon almost defies measurement because of the very privacy with which it occurs. We simply do not know for sure how many members adhere to a decision out of fear of isolation, but we do know it happens. If a congregation's leadership perceives that significant numbers of its members are not volunteering to join study groups, committees, or chapters, it is probably accurate to assume that a spiral of silence is one of the variables that has taken over much of the membership.

### **RESULT IS A LOSS**

A congregation that experiences the spiral of silence exhibits several signs that communication strategies must change. The widely distributed opinions of the influential few are always considered and seldom filtered for interaction within the membership at large. Plenary meetings are poorly attended. Volunteerism is diminishing. Increasingly, print communication is favored over interactive personal communication. The loss of enthusiasm for congregational projects becomes palpable and observable among the membership.

At a time when professional demands on religious are becoming more exacting, communication from the congregation can become a distraction that frustrates the religious if it demands additional commitment. The religious may opt to place congregational issues at the bottom of his or her list of concerns or abdicate personal opinion to the widely-distributed opinion, thus contributing to the spiral of silence.

### **POSSIBLE EARLY SOLUTIONS**

The spiral of silence is a net that catches many personal problems that contribute to the failure of religious to participate in congregational decisions. I have indicated here only one such problem: the overload of communication to individual members at the expense of personal interaction between members and leadership.



I suggest that the first major step for a congregation to take toward solving this problem is to engage in an audit of the strategies and styles the congregation and its leadership employ to communicate issues and concerns. The following template for such an audit should help the congregation faced with the need to present critical issues requiring community decisions.

**Publications.** Congregational publications should be consolidated to be fewer in number without sacrificing important information. Regulating the amount of space per article and the types of articles published will ensure balanced coverage of congregational concerns, information from leadership, and reports of individual members' achievements. For some congregations, publications do not even exist; this is extremely detrimental and is a major contributing factor in the spiral of silence.

**Meetings.** The practice of holding large group meetings may not be necessary, even in regard to critical issues. It is, however, important to create cluster meetings at which members can interact with each other and with a group leader. Large meetings should be followed by several small group gatherings to foster interaction—after the assembly has had ample time for prayer and integration of material.

**Interactive Communication.** What is the congregation's program for interaction with community members? A system by which members can meet with persons involved in congregational issues can help increase participation and interaction. Predictable leadership visits to local communities should be exchanged for more consistent and more frequent membership interactions with administrators at the local level, especially when participation in a critical concern is important.

## RETOOL FOR SURVIVAL

It always surprises me to learn that leaders of congregations and other religious institutions often chastise themselves for the less-than-optimal participation of members in some (if not all) important congregational decisions.

Usually, the problem can be traced to a lack of interactive communication in a community environ-

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ment that is significantly different from that of ten or twenty years ago. Fewer religious are working, but they are working harder. More religious are putting up with infirmities that prevent maximum participation. And many are in locations that make participation in community meetings and events fairly difficult. The simple process presented here should help congregations take seriously the need for more interactive communication. Research and practice in small-group communication and interpersonal communication would contribute immensely to further improving communication strategies. If a congregation has not retooled its strategies to fit the psychosociological needs of its members, its communication will produce a spiral of silence at best.



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# Male Spirituality Today

*Daniel M. Pietrzak, O.F.M. Conv., Ph.D.*

**A**s we move toward the millennium, one trend that has become increasingly important for many, particularly in the Western world, is the pursuit of authentic masculinity. For men, this pursuit has ramifications for personal identity and relationships with others. There are also important implications for one's personal spiritual journey, as Martin Pable, O.F.M. Cap., has suggested in his book *A Man and His God*. Since maleness permeates every aspect of a man's selfhood, it is only logical to conclude that it will and should affect his prayer life, ministry, and relatedness to others—within a religious community, in family life, and in any form of ministry. If the number of books and articles published is a true indicator of interest, there has been a remarkable growth in this area over the past decade.

What has prompted the contemporary search for a better understanding of the nature of maleness? In recent years, for a number of reasons, doubt and confusion have arisen as to what constitutes authentic masculinity. Part of this phenomenon is a result of the feminist movement. Yet despite the "male-bashing" sometimes associated with it, the feminist movement has been a positive force in the development of the current men's movement. Other sociological and psychological variables are at work as well. In *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*, Robert Moore

of Harvard University defines the basic problem for men today in this way:

What is missing is not, for the most part, what many depth psychologists assume is missing: that is, adequate connection with the *feminine*. In many cases these men seeking help had been, and were continuing to be, *overwhelmed* by the feminine. What they were missing was an adequate connection to the deep and instinctual *masculine* energies, the potentials of mature masculinity.

Moore goes on to say that men are blocked not only by feminists' attacks on what little masculinity they have managed to hold onto, but also by a lack of appropriate initiation into true masculinity, often attributable to a poor or nonexistent relationship with a father figure.

A similar concern permeates Sam Keen's book *Fire in the Belly*. Tracing the history of the various cultural models of what it has meant to be a man over the centuries, Keen contends that we are in search of a new model. On one hand, the new model will be less concerned with the "macho" autonomy of the self-made man. On the other, it will need to go beyond the meager parameters of the selfless consumer unsure of any definite moorings (see Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*), since postmodern man seems



increasingly to be lost in the wilderness of confusing plurality. “Who am I?” remains a valid question for every age, especially for men of today’s Western culture. Whatever the answer, a wealth of modern physiological, psychological, and anthropological research indicates convincingly that both feminine and masculine spiritualities are rooted in biology and physiology, nurtured by elemental human psychological processes, and enculturated by social forces of great antiquity. While admitting the excesses of an earlier patriarchal bias and the uneasiness of the present-day male/female conflict, modern studies do not find in androgyny (an amorphous sexuality) an adequate resolution to today’s questions about masculinity and femininity.

The pursuit of authentic masculinity has implications both for the personal identity of each male and for the relationships in which he engages, whether with other men or with women. Carol Gilligan (author of *In a Different Voice*) has pointed out some interesting features of male identity vis-à-vis female identity, stemming from the developmental process. In order to achieve autonomy, the young boy needs to separate himself from his maternal caregiver, something a young girl need not do. As a result, the male often has greater difficulty in allowing others to approach him, lest he be absorbed and lose his hard-won autonomy. In contrast, the girl, never having had to separate from her mother to attain a feminine identity, finds relating with others more natural. Her developmental problem revolves around establishing personal boundaries within her relationships. Those involved in the study of authentic masculinity recognize the negative impact of some dimensions of both “macho” and “consumer” masculinity on male friendship as well as on relatedness with women, both within and outside a marital bonding. Similarly, inadequate models of masculinity seem out of step with the call for greater collaboration in the workplace, in the marketplace, and in pastoral ministry.

## DEVELOPMENTAL TASK APPROACH

Let us begin with a brief overview of Keen’s approach to male maturity, as evidenced in his *Fire in the Belly*.

Keen advances the widely held view that each stage of development has a number of tasks associated with it. The person is challenged to meet the demands of these tasks in order to progress to a higher level of personal maturity. Keen sees the importance—even the necessity—of stepping aside from “business as usual” to engage in a process of self-exploration, with the goal of returning to the world of

human relationships better prepared to face its challenges.

Because modern Western society has no standard, culturally adopted rite of passage and no clearly defined and agreed-upon signs of masculine maturity, we have various criteria for determining whether someone has “made it” as a man. For some, the most important criterion is money; for others it is power; for still others it is recognition or sexual prowess. Keen argues that most of the Western world is moving from a patriarchal, technological, conflictual, and militaristic model of maleness to a more ecological and cooperative one. By saying this, Keen does not imply that men will be any less manly. (Some argue, in fact, that too much emphasis has been accorded in the past to sexism, genitality, and competitiveness in the definition of manliness—e.g., James Nelson, author of *The Intimate Connection*.) Rather, manhood will be expressed in different ways.

Support for the importance of a “time-out” to engage in this maturational process comes likewise from studies of cultural anthropologists such as Victor Turner (*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*), who have explored the role of liminal (i.e., threshold) experiences within traditional cultures. Such experiences require a certain separation from everyday life, an initiation, and a welcoming return. Examples of liminal experiences would include the rites of passage found in traditional societies, whereby, for example, a young man comes of age and assumes new duties and responsibilities as an adult in his culture, but not without a clear separation from his earlier boyhood experiences. Central to these rites are the “wise men” who accompany the young man in the process, introduce him to the secrets of adult manhood, and cheer him on as he makes the progress required to achieve his goal.

In *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*, Daniel Levinson speaks at length of the critical role of the wise man or mentor in male adult development. The most important developmental function for the mentor to fulfill is “to support and facilitate the realization of the Dream”:

He [the mentor] fosters the young adult’s development by believing in him, sharing the youthful Dream and giving it his blessing, helping to define the newly emerging self in its newly discovered world, and creating a space in which the young man can work on a reasonably satisfactory life structure that contains the Dream.

Eventually, continues Levinson, the young man will outgrow his mentor and assume his own identity. Nevertheless, “the internalization of significant fig-

ures is a major source of development in adulthood."

To return to the central theme: it is important for each man, according to Keen, to make a journey—no longer the quest of the knights, not even the pilgrimage of the ages of stronger faith. The journey available to and recommended for every contemporary Western man is the pilgrimage into the self—not as an end in itself but as an indispensable step toward the full realization of one's masculine nature. According to Keen, the tasks involved in this pilgrimage include:

- a journey from sunny pragmatism to dark wonder (to listen to one's dreams);
- a journey from having the answers to living the questions;
- a journey from cocksureness to potent doubt;
- a journey from numbness to manly grief;
- a journey from artificial toughness to virile fear;
- a journey from guilt/shame to responsible morality;
- a journey from isolation to awareness of loneliness;
- a journey from false optimism to honest despair;
- a journey from compulsive action to fallowness and waiting; and
- eventually, a journey toward renewal and rebirth of joy.

Obviously, confusion and pain are involved in what is a grieving process of sorts. One dies to and lets go of a less mature self-understanding to embrace a new and richer one. The personal grieving of the individual man is complicated by the expectations of those about him and of society in general. Nevertheless, the anticipated final goal is that everyone will eventually benefit from the process.

As believers, we add a spiritual dimension to this pilgrimage and obtain a still fuller picture of what is happening. The inner journey enables us to approach God on a new plane and to understand ourselves anew in the light of God. Saint Augustine prayed, "*Noverim te; noverim me.*" And in his own time, Saint Bonaventure came to see the important dynamic of the *Mind's Road to God*, beginning with intrapsychic exploration. We could say the same for Saint Ignatius of Loyola and many others.

One emerges from this inner pilgrimage realizing that the next step will require fresh virtues as one enters once again into everyday human life, particularly into relationships. The virtues associated with the new man ready to engage in cooperative (ecological) relationships are wonder, empathy, a heartfelt mind, moral outrage, right livelihood, enjoyment, friendship, communion, husbandry, and wildness.

## PRODDING BY THE UNCONSCIOUS

While Keen and others speak of liminal experiences and developmental tasks, some prefer to see development in terms of incorporating various archetypal patterns into the male consciousness. Robert Bly, for example, in his book *Iron John*, develops a theory of masculine development based on the Grimms' mythical character by that name. Students of mythology like the late Joseph Campbell (author of *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*) detect a recurrent pattern in the popular mythologies of cultures throughout the world. Studying these myths is not an esoteric exploration of the quaintly unusual. On the contrary, it offers deep insights into the inner nature of the human spirit. Carol Pearson speaks of a set of six archetypes in her book *The Hero Within*. The notion of the hero figures strongly in the work of Dwight Judy, whose *Healing the Male Soul* describes that task in terms of achieving a synthesis of the hero-warrior with the hero-transcendent to become the hero-creative.

Robert Johnson, author of *He*, understands masculinity according to the famous myth of the Holy Grail, each man being a Parsifal in his own unique way. Richard Rohr has extended these reflections to the area of spirituality in his book *Quest for the Grail*. Ultimately, we need to acknowledge that much of the work in the area of self-exploration comes as a result of the insights of Carl Jung and promoted by his followers. Only in recent years have those insights been evaluated for their full worth.

Robert Moore has developed the Jungian approach to deal with the masculine spirit in his book *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*. According to Moore, Jungian studies have gleaned four basic archetypes for the adult male. Each finds its origin in the psychology of the boy and reaches its fulfillment when its boy-level version is replaced by the adult-level one. The King finds his origins in the divine child archetype, the Magician in the precocious child, the Lover in the oedipal child, and the Warrior in the hero child. Another basic concept in Moore's theory is that there is an appropriate level of each archetype and a unique integration of all of them into the individuated composite of each male adult. For example, one could err in his acquisition of the king archetype, thus becoming either a tyrant or a weakling. Or if there were too much warrior in the composite, the harmonizing, compassionate dimension of the adult would be underdeveloped. Each of the archetypes contributes to the fullness of masculine personality in a unique way.

**The King** is the source of orderliness and fecundity. He defines limits and sets boundaries. It is he who



brings fertility to a relationship with his capacity for generativity (which is both physical and psychological), whereby he recognizes the gifts of those about him, nurtures them through affirmation, and coordinates the efforts of all for the common good. Two extremes that might occur in the “incarnation” of this archetype could lead to one’s becoming either a self-aggrandizing tyrant or an indecisive weakling.

**The Warrior** manifests courage and the capacity to overcome obstacles. He epitomizes loyalty and commitment, with the detachment such commitment may sometimes demand. In the extreme, however, he can be destructive, even sadistic. Obviously, his opposite would lack basic ego strength and the capacity to defend himself physically or psychically.

**The Magician** provides the insight, knowledge, and technology for the person, allowing clarity of vision in the pursuit of some goal. In the extreme, such knowledge can be diabolical and manipulative, depending on the use to which it is placed. Moore characterizes the opposite extreme as the Dummy, who is unaware of the deeper reasons for his actions.

**The Lover** brings the dimension of harmony and relationship, of emotional bonding, and ultimately of mysticism (i.e., oneness with everything and everyone). Furthermore, the Lover seeks to move beyond the status quo and longs for a better world. Therefore, the Lover represents the dreamer, the idealist; he “humanizes” the world. But even this archetype is not without its shadow side. In the extreme, the Lover becomes the Addict, possessed by (rather than possessed of) the gifts enumerated. He lacks the detachment needed to recognize the boundaries between himself and the one loved, with the result that there can occur an unhealthy merging of selves rather than a true interpersonal relationship.

Indeed, it is only when these archetypes are blended in each person in the process Jung called individuation that mature masculinity results. To give one application: the Lover needs the King to define limits and give him structure. He also needs the Warrior to be able to act decisively and to move beyond what could become a web of immobilizing sensuality. Finally, the Lover needs the Magician to give him perspective and help him see the big picture (not without reason is it said that Love is blind). Conversely, the other three archetypes, taken both singularly and collectively, would be incomplete without the humanizing dimension of the Lover.

## APPLYING THE THEORETICAL

All this may sound somewhat remote and abstract. We can make it more concrete by examining the sources of the life of a particular person: the founder of the Franciscan Order, Saint Francis of Assisi. It is not necessary to probe too deeply to discern that Francis engaged in a true interior pilgrimage and underwent several liminal experiences in his spiritual evolution. Likewise, in his own unique way, Francis can be said to have incorporated the images of King, Warrior, Magician, and Lover into his rich and mature masculine personality.

We read in the early sources that Francis withdrew from his friends and former way of life. His imprisonment and the sickness he experienced upon his return to Assisi had helped pave the way to this new stage in his life. Spending long hours in the caves of Monte Subasio, imitating the practices of the itinerant penitents, going on pilgrimage to the tombs of the apostles in Rome: all these actions were part and parcel of his inner pilgrimage. Through them, Francis came to know himself and came to know God in relation to himself. He was more able to hear the crucified speaking to him at San Damiano. He was being prepared for the significant moment of his conversion, as he recalls in his *Testament*: the embrace of the leper.

From the Jungian perspective, Francis the Warrior redirected his energies from the Crusades in the Holy Land to self-conquest and to a new, peace-filled campaign to spread the Good News. The Lover was an obvious archetype in Francis as he struggled with his commitment to celibacy, tried to live in harmony with his brothers and with all creation, and entered into a powerful unitive experience of God with the stigmatization on Mount Alvernia. His keen insight, related to the Magician archetype, enabled him to recognize God in faith and to find in him the rhyme and reason for his life and for that of his fledgling community. Through prayer and contemplation, Francis gained significant insights into human nature (see his *Admonitions*). Finally, a certain level of Kingship was evident in Francis, for he saw in each friar a gift of God; he affirmed their talents and exhorted them to unity and the pursuit of the common good. Though he was largely unsuccessful in governing his burgeoning community, he was still able to manifest his leadership through prayer and example.

Along similar lines, Patrick Arnold, author of *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings*, attempts to apply the insights of the men’s movement to the spirit enlivening the great male figures of the Bible. He sees Abraham, for example, as Father and Pilgrim; Moses as Warrior and Magician; Solomon as King; Elijah as Wildman; Elisha as Healer; Jeremiah as Prophet; Jonah as

Trickster; and Jesus as the perfect archetypal fusion of them all. If Arnold is correct, the ultimate self-realization for each man is the partaking of the chalice of suffering in imitation of Christ, with total self-surrender and a magnanimity that participates in God's own love for his Son.

## SOME METHODS SUGGESTED

In this age of feminism, the best way for men to come to appreciate what is truly valuable in both the masculine and the feminine, and to become able to enter into meaningful relationships with both men and women, is to take care of the development of their masculine identity. Moore concludes his book by offering some techniques for understanding where we are in the assimilation of the various archetypes and their relationship to one another. One method involves interior dialogue between the various components of the personality. We allow the different aspects of the self to address one another, thus getting a reading of the current level of their development and integration. Another technique involves invocation, or accessing the wanted dimensions of our yet-incomplete masculinity. Two other techniques consist of the study of integrated personalities from the past and present and, finally, "acting as if" we have already acquired the archetype that we most desire but recognize as most lacking.

The methods suggested by Moore find resonance in some Christian practices. Interior dialogue finds its counterpart in regular self-examination. Prayer is certainly a way to invoke the Lord to allow those underdeveloped aspects of self to emerge and correct the more poorly developed ones in the process. Do not many of the lives of the saints provide a compelling testimony to lead us beyond our current level of development? Furthermore, the practice of virtues moves us beyond the status quo as we strive to live out the ideals we are pursuing. Arnold would complete these approaches by adding prayerful reflection on the scriptures, and particularly on the great men who walk their pages.

Finally, we can derive a number of implications of these considerations for both initial and continuing formation programs. Initiation into religious life seems to fall under the categories studied by Turner and others and thus should involve liminal experiences quite different from the rest of day-to-day living. To what extent have we departed from this approach in contemporary formation programs, even in the novitiate? Is formation today too much like the rest of life? Perhaps in our zeal to overcome the arti-

ficiality of some aspects of an earlier formational model, we have failed to appreciate the value of the "specialness" of the period of initial formation. The neophyte is invited away from life as usual to assimilate a new identity, which he can then bring back to the ordinary circumstances of life.

The midlife period would seem to be another critical moment when some comparable liminal experience would be important to the further maturation of the person, especially in the light of studies done by Bly and others about the underdevelopment of healthy masculinity in the Western adult of today.

I would like to conclude by returning to the concept of the wise man and his critical role in male adult development and, consequently, in the formation process of the young adult. The mentor, unlike the parent, is not tied to his younger protégé. He has a selfless yet highly rewarding role to play. In his best portrayal, he manifests both the love needed to permit the various talents to flourish and the distance necessary to allow the young man his needed independence. Many of us have had the good fortune of such mentors in our life: teachers, formators, older priests or religious. If we take seriously the studies of Levinson, Bly, Moore, and others, such mentoring is becoming uniquely important today because of the limitations in human male parenting—which may become even more pronounced in an age of broken homes. Mentoring bears fruit, however, not only for the young man who grows in his identity but also for the mentor himself. It is precisely such generativity within the celibate commitment that enables the male religious to bring a new generation into existence. It marks the mature level of male spirituality. There is probably no more noble task that he can perform.

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# Monastic Asylums

Benedict Auer, O.S.B., D.Min.

**I**n 1961 Erving Goffman published his pivotal work *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. The book divided “total institutions” into five types: (1) institutions for the care of individuals (e.g., homes for the aged); (2) places established to care for persons felt to be both incapable of looking after themselves and a threat to the community (e.g., mental institutions); (3) institutions organized to protect the community against what are thought to be intentional dangers to it (e.g., jails, concentration camps); (4) institutions purportedly established to pursue some worklike task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds (e.g., army camps), and (5) establishments designed as retreats from the world, often serving as training stations for the religious (e.g., abbeys, convents). While it may seem amazing that monasteries and convents were included in this study, it should not surprise us: for centuries, monks and nuns have pictured themselves as fleeing from the world and seeking “asylum” within the walls of their various foundations.

I did not become interested in the topic of institutionalization overnight. A few years ago, I wrote an article on the formation process within monasteries for *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* (Winter 1995) entitled “New Techniques for Religious Formation.” It was an attempt to suggest the borrowing of some approaches

from the field of special education in order to better structure the period of acculturation into the monastery and help produce more balanced monks. After finishing the article, however, I was still bothered by the fact that many monastics are institutionalized, in a negative sense, after years in the monastery. That is, they tend to be totally dependent on their monastic administration for everything—even, at times, their very thoughts. They tend to be victims of the system, at least in their own estimation, yet have learned to use the system to their advantage. Many are “time-warped” into adolescence for life. But I could not find very much on the topic until the day I asked Bob Harvie, an associate professor of criminal justice at St. Martin’s College in Lacey, Washington, if he had any books on the concept of institutionalization. He immediately mentioned *Asylums*, Erving Goffman’s main contribution to the field of criminal justice. Initially, I thought it seemed pretty farfetched to compare asylums, prisons, and monasteries. Yet on reading the book, I felt that Goffman was right on target about the topic I envisioned for my research: monasteries and convents are a form of asylum, and the actions and characteristics of their inmates are similar to those seen in prisons, mental institutions, and so forth. I did come to realize that there had not been an update of Goffman’s work

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## As I celebrated my own twentieth year in the monastery, I started to notice that many monks had become institutionalized

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since Vatican II, which inaugurated changes in the state of monastic life. Yet a number of the conditions Goffman observed—some good, some bad—continue to exist in many monasteries.

I first heard of institutionalization when my father told me stories of his nine years in a tuberculosis sanatorium. He entered it during World War II and remained there until long after the war. One day he told me that many of the people who had left the sanatorium returned to live in the town surrounding it. Only two people, himself included, had made a life outside the environment of the institution. When I asked him why he thought this was so, he replied, “They had become institutionalized.”

Notwithstanding my father’s observation, I was surprised to learn of the high number of returnees to prisons. One night on television, a man who had previously been released from prison but was again behind bars was asked why he had failed in the outside world. His answer was simple: “In here, I get three square meals a day, everything is provided for, and I know what is going to happen at all times.”

As I celebrated my own twentieth year in the monastery, I started to notice that many monks had become institutionalized. Their motto was basically feed me, clothe me, support me, and in return I will do what I am supposed to do (not always well, but well enough that no one gets upset).

Institutionalization is a problem in all total institutions. People become so used to the system that they become totally dependent on it or codependent. Their often unspoken feelings are “Take care of me,” “I want this,” or “You owe me.” Monks and nuns seldom speak these phrases, but they regularly act them out. Recently, I myself went to the eye doctor and got a pair of glasses. I needed them; it had been three

years since my last vision examination. But I never asked the price. I knew the bill would be sent and paid for—no questions asked. When I went home for a visit, I found my mother upset because my sister had just gotten glasses that cost over \$500, and she did not know how she was going to pay for them. At that moment, I realized that even I had become institutionalized.

Erving Goffman’s *Asylums* is dated, at least with regard to certain practices in monasteries and convents (e.g., culpa service) that have become obsolete since Vatican II. Yet the book is still on target: Goffman captures the essence of the institutionalization process in religious life. After more than thirty-five years, I think it is time to revisit this pivotal work as we strive to develop new and better ways to help religious and monastics pursue Christ in a healthy, adult manner.

### TOTAL INSTITUTIONS

Goffman defines the central feature of total institutions as having three parts. First, “all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority.” Today’s monastic institutions and cloistered convents are still structured under these guidelines; for example, the abbey is where all is conducted under an abbot. The Rule of Saint Benedict states it quite simply: “There are the cenobites, that is to say, those who belong to a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot.” Second, “each phase of the member’s daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all . . . treated alike and required to do the same thing together.” Just one example of this from the Rule is that “no one is to presume to eat or drink before or after the time appointed”; many more could be added. Third, “all phases of the day’s activities are tightly scheduled.” Everything from food to sleep, from prayer to work is regulated within the Rule. Even though monastic life is now less restricted than it was prior to Vatican II, I believe that monasteries still qualify as total institutions.

One thing that Goffman mentions that has changed considerably since Vatican II—but certainly not universally—is that “the inmate is excluded from knowledge of the decisions taken regarding his fate.” Most monastics can probably still tell stories of arbitrary decision making minus the person involved, but these incidents are getting rarer. I recall a story of two brothers who entered the monastery, one wishing to become a priest and the other a lay brother; the abbot chose the opposite of their wishes. Arbitrary decision making no longer takes place on that scale, but it still exists in subtle and confusing ways. For in-



stance, a monk or nun might be told not to go off to school yet not be given a reason—although even that would be rare today. A lot depends on the control that an abbot exercises in his community. Controlling superiors tend to be rare; they burn out quickly or have “nervous breakdowns” because far-reaching control is rarely possible in this day and age.

Goffman also observes that “total institutions are . . . incompatible with another crucial element of our society, the family.” Monasticism might be at odds with this statement because we base our Rule on a family structure—that is, the abbot is father of the community. Many monks and nuns, joking about this particular part of the Rule, say “The monastery is a typical family—dysfunctional.” In truth, I believe that on this issue, monasticism does not compare to the other total institutions Goffman examines—but he does warn us that not all the institutions meet each of the criteria.

Goffman ends the first part of his study with an important observation, especially pertinent to those I call the institutionalized—namely, people who eventually become totally dependent on the community and lose their personal will to do anything:

The total institution is a social hybrid, part residential, part formal organization; therein lies its special sociological interest. There are other reasons for being interested in these establishments too. In our society, they are the forcing houses of changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self.

## DISPOSSESSION OF IDENTITY

In the second part of his work, Goffman tackles the inmate world. It is an important topic for those interested in the formation of new religious and monastics. “It is characteristic of inmates,” Goffman writes, “that they come to the institution with a ‘presenting culture’ derived from a ‘home world.’” Furthermore, he contends, what they experience within the institution is not assimilation or acculturation but “disculturation” or “untraining.” The monastery must disculturate novices from the world they have just left. Often, novices arrive without the religious and social skills necessary to live the monastic or religious life. They need instruction or role modeling in order to grasp such simple yet alien concepts as silence and solitude. They are also lacking in religious information, including even the simple truths of the faith. Frequently, the director of formation must spend the postulancy instructing candidates in what they should believe as Catholics. At the same time, these young (not always in age) persons must be disentangled from society at large. For instance, they

often must be taught how to live in community. In the past, when many novices came from large families, this was easily done; today, however, when it is more common for novices to be single children, it is a difficult task. We no longer can anticipate that just living in community will achieve this end.

Disculturation, I believe, is only one part of the novice’s experience; inculturation is the other. As Goffman notes, novices are dispossessed of their previous identity, much like prisoners or mental patients. This dispossession is painful. Today, especially among the growing number of older vocations, the process can be extremely painful. Many of these individuals possess a strong identity and often had established careers before entering the monastery. All of a sudden, the novice who previously was a teacher, an administrator, a chemist is cleaning toilets within the confines of a monastic environment. That is a radical change. I remember when I experienced it myself, having entered the monastery at 36 years of age. A monk confronted me as to why I was having an identity crisis. “When I first entered the monastery,” he told me, “I did dishes for the entire community every day, and cleaned all the toilets.”

I asked him, “How old were you?”

“Eighteen,” he replied.

“How many novices were there?” I asked.

His answer: “Eight.”

I replied, “I am 36 years old, and there is only one of me.”

Disculturation! I believe we often forget this part of our present monastic formation programs. Goffman raises the issue, and his analysis helps us see that it is even more of a problem in the 1990s than it was in the 1960s. As he writes, “In religious institutions there are special arrangements to ensure that all inmates take a turn performing the more menial aspects of the servant role.” But when this is done, there should be consideration of where the individuals have come from and who they are.

## SEPARATION FROM BELONGINGS

The monk entering a community also becomes dispossessed of material objects. As Goffman writes, “Religious orders have appreciated the implications for self of such separation from belongings.” He continues, “Inmates may be required to change their cells once a year so as not to become attached to them.” All this is based on chapter 55 of the Rule. Today the changing of rooms may not be enforced, but separation from belongings is certainly still present: no television, no stereo, no Internet. These important aspects of modern society must be left behind; they

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## Many monks remain adolescents their entire lives; they suffer a sort of Peter Pan syndrome à la monastery

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are not allowed until first vows or even later. We deprive novices—often overnight—of many things they thought were integral to their happiness and sensory pleasure. The postulancy and the novitate are thus often times of tremendous sensory deprivation. Goffman also observes that “on admission to a total institution . . . the individual is likely to be stripped of his usual appearance and of the equipment and services by which he maintains it, thus suffering a personal defacement.” Saint Benedict covers this in chapter 58 of the Rule; it is another aspect of disculturation. Hair is often cut differently; clothes are replaced with a habit. Monastic houses now have to ask male novices to remove earrings and jewelry as well.

### PUBLIC HUMILIATION

Goffman mentions a number of practices of public humiliation that have been done away with or so modified as to be almost meaningless. He spends some time on culpa sessions, which most houses have since eliminated. “Kneeling out” is another practice that has been stopped. I recall that when I first entered the monastery, kneeling out was still done on an infrequent basis (e.g., before vows or when you broke something). Although such practices were gradually abandoned after Vatican II, other humiliations—less public but just as effective—are still in place. For example, 35-year-old men and women are corrected as if they were children or adolescents. One area in which such public correction is practiced is table reading. In monastic houses that still have table reading, the corrector is often someone who has been in the monastery his or her whole adult life. This person frequently forgets that the monastery has its own specialized vocabulary. A professional

person who enters the monastery today may have a master’s degree or other qualifications in a certain field but be totally unaware of the monastic vocabulary. Table reading is riddled with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew words, and most 30-year-olds entering the monastery have not studied these languages. Communities need to exercise charity with regard to their new members, not criticism in the negative sense. We can all expect to have to learn new vocabularies in our fast-changing world.

### PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIPS

Goffman tackles the problem of “particular friendships,” although he does not use that term. He writes, “When a significant other must be denounced, and especially when this other is physically present, confession of the relationship to outsiders can mean an intense contamination of the relationship and, through this, of the self.” He then relates the story of a sister in a Poor Clare monastery who was tormented by her denunciation of another sister.

When I was 18, I was a novice in a brothers’ congregation where this practice had destructive consequences. It could be very sadistic. Goffman compares it with the practice, in mental hospitals, of requiring patient pairs conducting an affair to discuss their relationship during group therapy. He ends this section by pointing out that staying out of trouble requires “persistent conscious effort.” Simple practices like asking permission are especially difficult for people entering a community at age 35 or older; the freedom to which they have been so long accustomed is suddenly and drastically curtailed. Today’s arrivals at the monastery door must be vigilant at all times, so much so that they may forgo sociability with their fellows to avoid possible incidents. In other words, we might find this the reason that novices and juniors sometimes fail to attend community recreation sessions.

### ASSAULTS UPON ONE’S SELF

The part of Goffman’s study that most interested me was his analysis of the destruction of the person’s right to be who he or she is. Goffman puts it quite succinctly:

Total institutions disrupt or defile precisely those actions that in civil society have the role of attesting to the actor and those in his presence that he has some command over his world—that he is a person with “adult” self-determination, autonomy, and freedom of action. A failure to retain this kind of adult executive competency, or at least the symbols of it, can produce in the inmate the terror of feeling radically demoted in the age-grading system.



Consequently, many monks remain adolescents their entire lives. Never really growing up, they suffer a sort of Peter Pan syndrome à la monastery. Goffman also touches on the subject of “assaults upon the self.” As he observes, the monastic routine reminds us of who we are and who God is, and therefore assaults upon the self should not occur in monastic life—but they do, because monks are human beings and often dysfunctional. An awareness of this problem is absolutely essential to a good formation program.

But what happens when the formation director or junior director is dysfunctional? With personnel stretched beyond their limits, many formation personnel are doing multiple jobs, and not always well. Today, in the field of education, we realize that role modeling is paramount in instruction. Yet formation personnel who are overextended or have their own serious emotional problems are not good role models. In 1961 Goffman saw this problem, and today we still struggle with it.

Goffman also discusses house rules, rewards and privileges, and punishments peculiar to total institutions. All these institutional activities and regulations create a structure in which order is maintained and discipline is achieved. The chapters on excommunication in the Rule are illustrative of such structure within monasteries and convents. Goffman does differentiate between convicts and novices to religious communities by pointing out that the latter are voluntary inmates and believe they have received a calling or vocation.

## AWARENESS IS KEY

After more than 35 years, Goffman’s insights are still relevant. I believe that every formation director should read *Asylums*. Monasteries are total institutions and frequently take on the negative character-

istics of such institutions. Yet Goffman demonstrates that the end result or purpose of the monastery is entirely different from that of other forms of total institutions (e.g., prisons, boarding schools). As Frank Bianco writes in *Voices of Silence: Lives of Trappists Today*,

It was a rare postulant who could withstand the pressure of self-revelation and the disintegration of the facade. The regimen was the abrasive that stripped away the mask, primarily due to the emphasis on self-discipline and obedience.

The unvarying schedule burdened a monk. He had to do the work assigned him, go to choir, obey the Rule. He was held accountable. Any absence or failure had to be explained. . . . It made him look at himself, question his motives.

I believe that Vatican II has helped us humanize the monastic process. Yet while our life in religious community has become more human, it will always be dysfunctional, for monasteries are human institutions.

Goffman’s study, published over three decades ago, still serves to make us aware of the sociological problem of institutionalization. The answer lies not in rules but in awareness.



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# An Aquatic Metaphor

*Reverend Laurence J. Borges*

**M**y life began when a cloud dropped me into a lake high on a mountaintop. Life was easy there. I formed part of a placid lake. Even when the sun shone brightly, we drops of water were cool. An eagle flying over us could see himself reflected in our clear water. When winter arrived some of us formed a thick layer of ice. Others remained fluid beneath the ice. It was there that the fish survived the winter. There was a quiet rhythm to our life: the cold and snow of winter, the spring thaw and rain, the summer heat and sunshine, and the colors and briskness of fall. Year after year I lived through this cycle until I began to be restless. I thought that there must be more to life than what I experienced high in the mountain. I heard that some of us had left the solitude of the lake and started down the mountainside as part of a small brook. We never heard anything from them or about them. Their fate was unknown to us.

I became so restless that I decided to take a chance and follow those who had left. I let the wind push me to the beginning of the brook. When I became part of the brook and started down the mountainside at a pace that I had never experienced before, I became frightened. There were other drops of water experiencing the same thing, so I went along with them.

Soon another brook joined ours, and then another and another, until we formed a mighty stream. We be-

came home to trout and bass. I began to feel part of a larger and more exciting world. The mountain lake, with its tranquility and security, slowly faded from memory.

I then noticed something new. Our stream created a noise as we rushed down the mountainside. The hunter and the hiker would know that our stream existed. We began to make our mark in the world.

Soon I heard a much louder noise in the distance. As we flowed along, the noise got louder and louder. I looked ahead, and the stream seemed to come to an abrupt end, but the noise continued to become louder. All of a sudden I started falling head-down at a furious speed. I had become a part of a great waterfall. That moment showed me in a very dramatic way that there was no turning back. My destiny lay ahead of me.

After that adventure of a free fall, we drops of water that made up the stream continued to flow along. We were joined by other streams as we went ahead, and soon we all formed a mighty river. A far greater number of fish lived in our river and provided sport and food for humans. Boats, large and small, were able to go from place to place, thanks to us. We now felt that we were living useful lives—at the service of fish, fowl, and humans. We were making a great contribution to life. We continued moving as a great and

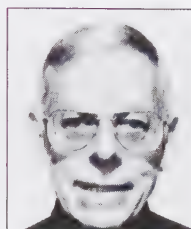


# When I became part of the brook and started down the mountainside at a pace that I had never experienced before, I became frightened

useful river for miles and miles. We thought that this would be our destiny forever. However, this part of our journey came to an end and another part began as we entered a vast ocean. This proved to be our true

and final destiny. We called the ocean Eternity, as it will take an eternity to explore the depths of this immense body of water and to discover and delight in the countless treasures that it contains.

*This story was inspired by the author's visit to Johnson Canyon in Banff National Park. Read it again and reflect upon the various stages of life that you have passed through to date. Then project yourself into the future and try to anticipate what lies ahead of you. Does your life have any similarities to that of the drop of water? Can you picture how your life's journey will end and what will be your true and final destiny?*



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(signed) James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Editor-in-Chief

# Addiction in Communal Life

*Julie Wokasch, O.S.B., M.Div.*

**T**welve-step programs seem to be creating distress in some religious communities in which members feel called to them for recovery. This article explores some of the reasons for the community discomfort and offers some questions to ponder for those who feel most threatened. I also give a brief history of my own religious formation in the early 1960s to shed some light on the struggle some young men and women go through to maintain their identity.

During the spring of 1990 I was handed a paper entitled "Individual Versus Collective Will: A Dilemma for the Roman Catholic in Twelve-Step Recovery." The author was Mark M., a student at St. Louis University. The very first quote in the paper captured my attention: "To be nobody but myself—in a world which is doing its best . . . to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting" (e.e. cummings).

I was just beginning recovery in codependency and was feeling like a chick trying to break forth from a shell with no moisture to soften it. I held on to that shell, which had nourished me, protected me, and even enabled me in my addictions. In the safe confines of the shell, I had no need to look at the psychological resistance named denial. When I stayed snug and secure in my shell, I could live my blame-

assignment existence. If I stayed in my shell, I didn't need an identity.

## **BLAME AND SHAME**

What is blame assignment? In the sixties and seventies, religious were not involved in choosing their ministry. Sisters were sent to teach with no education and often were about the same age as their students. If I was appointed a school principal and made a mess of it because of my limited experience, it really wasn't my responsibility. After all, I was just doing the job out of obedience. Some sisters were asked to work 18- to 20-hour shifts at the hospitals run by the community. It wasn't their fault, was it, if they began stealing their patients' drugs to stay awake and go to sleep? They were just doing the job assigned them in obedience.

For the past 25 years, Sister X has been taking off her veil, grabbing her little book bag, and heading for the nearest liquor store to get her two months' supply of whiskey. It's not her fault that no one in the community has ever confronted her drinking problem, is it? We've all seen her fall from her chair at dinner and stagger and collapse in the halls of the monastery, but it's not her fault that she's never been in treatment. Some of us have taken the risk of speak-



ing to the powers that be, but the response is always, "Sister is such a talented woman, so good and so holy. She could never have a drinking problem." Now, after all these years, the excuse for Sister not getting help is, "She's just too old to have to go through all that."

In taking the vow of obedience, we believed that we had given away our right of choice. What we didn't seem to realize was that if we had made the choice of no choice, we had also given up the right to blame and shame those to whom we had abrogated that right. Blame and shame seemed, to me, a strong base for my earlier days in the community.

We walked monasteried halls with eyes downcast and hands under scapulars. For some nuns, long gowns hid flasks of liquor and pills robbed from patients. Under those chaste robes roared bitter jealousies in youthful hearts that were not being taught how to love and be loved. There we were, in our starched headpieces and flowing robes, looking untouchable and feeling so terminally unique.

It seemed to me that we were above the law. If Sister B had an affair with the choir director, it was the choir director's fault. Because of our habits, which often hid habits as human as those of our lay brothers and sisters, our need for healing went unnoticed; before the world, we were not allowed to be vulnerable.

The habits are gone for most of us. The sense of terminal uniqueness remains, and we put it on as we used to don our veils to get into a movie for free. Our feeling of uniqueness seems to make us believe that we are better than "the common people." Yet doesn't the word *communal* speak of the common? As we waddle down our sparkling clean hallways, satiated with food some common folk cannot afford, having indulged in our addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, work, religion, relationships, power—will we not suffocate in our protective shells of terminal uniqueness?

## ADDICTION AND CONTROL

Addictions, most authors agree, are symptoms of deeper problems. In her book *Codependence: Misunderstood and Mistreated*, Anne Wilson Schaef states that when children grow up in dishonest, confused family systems, their major survival mechanism is to try to figure out what is going on and then control it. All addictions are based on issues of control—control needed to hide the loss of self.

What happens when teenagers are taken from their homes and dressed in identical black robes? These same teens are sent to the garden, kitchen, or laundry for hours at a time. They are also expected to go to school full-time and to be asleep in bed by

9:30 p.m. In our case, we pretended we were asleep and then studied in crawlspaces of the buildings, under beds and covers, and on the roof. In our case, we were caught and told to take our meals kneeling on the floor, to kiss the floor, or to say prayers with arms extended, before the entire community, as they ate their meals in silence. In our case, I believe all 20 plus of us were punished for making a choice—the choice to pass our classes. We were also punished for what is normal in teens and young adults: seeking independence and learning to make personal choices.

In *Codependence*, Schaef writes, "Basically the church [and, I would add, the community] teaches us that we can control our life and our destiny by doing the right thing and being the right kind of person. This, of course, is a fallacy, since we do not control our lives. We can influence our lives, but we cannot control them." As young people in community, we got caught between control that was oppressive and our own inner urgings, which reflected our sense that something was very wrong.

In twelve-step programs, the first step reads, "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable." There were times I felt so powerless but not empowered. There was little affirmation or affection. For those like myself, who came from broken and dysfunctional families, it became natural to fall in step and still always be out of step. In an article entitled "Pastoral Care of Dependent Persons" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1993), Father Richard Vaughan explains that paradox as follows:

Frequently, dependent people allow others to assume the responsibility of making decisions for them because they lack the self-confidence and are unable to function without the advice and guidance of others. . . . One of the major ways dependent people are affected by religious belief and practice is through their relationship with church personnel. Dependent people often look up to priests, ministers, and sisters as being unusually gifted and tend to seek them out when they feel in need of advice. If they have a friend who is a priest, minister, or sister, they are proud of the friendship.

This raises two questions for me: What happens when the priest, minister, or sister is also dependent? What does the dependent priest, minister, or sister gain from being needed? Step two of a twelve-step program reads, "[We] came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." In this step we come to realize that we are not the all-powerful ones. Mark M. writes, "Both alcoholics and codependents in recovery can recall moments of feeling separated from the life going on around them. They have no trouble remembering the degradation

of their talents or the disintegration of their spirits." What of communities that denied members the right to do artwork, play instruments, or write music because they might become too proud?

Finding objective material on this subject is not easy. I have gathered many ideas and accounts of experiences from men and women living in religious communities and from people who have observed religious communities from the outside as counselors and spiritual directors. Men and women from St. Louis to Spokane have helped validate my journey of "being nobody but myself" by sharing their stories with me.

## DENIAL IS DANGEROUS

It is not known how many women and men in religious orders and congregations are suffering through lives of addiction. Today, all too few communities are beginning to crack through the shell of denial by allowing themselves to speak about issues of communal dysfunction. Too many communities continue to project the problem outside themselves. A tragic event in Spokane, Washington, brought this home to me. On May 17, 1994, the *Spokesman-Review* carried the front-page headline RELIGION STUDENT ARRESTED, with the subhead "Catholic Brother Accused of Molesting 13-Year-Old." On May 19, across the top of page B1, bold letters proclaimed, SUSPECT'S BAIL DOUBLED AFTER HE'S OUT OF JAIL. The article began as follows:

A Spokane judge more than doubled the bail Wednesday for a Catholic brother accused of child molestation, saying he feared the suspect's religious order may hide him if he's not in jail. The judge said he could recall other cases when a religious order—facing similar charges against a member—"hid the suspect away" after posting bail for him.

On May 30, this headline appeared: STUDENT AT SEMINARY APPARENTLY KILLS SELF. The newspaper reported that the seminarian, a "44-year-old teacher from Cleveland, walked out of a retreat hall north of Spokane, started his car in a garage and sat in it until he suffocated."

In an article on "Clergy and Religious Health Committees" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Spring 1993), Richard M. Bridburg, M.D., points out that "no standardized structure exists today to help priests and religious women and men whose ministry is impaired by emotional illness or chemical dependency. . . . The essential philosophical underpinning of a workable system rests on the public's right to be genuinely protected from an impaired

professional and the practitioner's right to objective, fair, and nonpunitive assessment, with opportunity for treatment and rehabilitation when appropriate."

## CODEPENDENCY IN COMMUNITY

Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon contend, in an article entitled "Codependency to Contemplation" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Summer 1991), that codependency is the addictive mode of about 96 percent of our society. If this is true, the religious community is a natural utopia for those caught up in perfectionism, control, and people-pleasing. "Most codependents," Au and Cannon observe, "because they have never known anything except conditional acceptance and love, believe that they are not acceptable or loveable unless they are perfect." It isn't long before codependents who enter the community recognize how good, how perfect they must be to be accepted. And accepted they must be—for failure is the one thing they cannot tolerate. "The perfectionism of the codependent is also manifested in a style of relationship that is based on control and manipulation rather than honesty and mutuality," Au and Cannon write. "When codependents feel insecure and powerless, they compensate by acting the opposite. . . . their painful feelings of helplessness and denial are converted to feelings of power by focusing all their attention on meeting the needs of others." In my community of the 1960s and 1970s, such people would be the "good little sisters" respected by all and pampered by authority.

Michael Crosby, in his book *The Dysfunctional Church*, says that "dysfunctional family roles tend to get repeated when addicts and codependents enter the ministry. Depending on the dynamics in their family of origin, ministers often fill the traditional roles of the self-reliant and perfectionistic hero, the accomplished and successful do-er, the reclusive and self-effacing lost child, the ever-happy mascot, the nurturing and helpful enabler, the bumbling and scorned scapegoat, and the asexual and forever-giving saint."

Adolph Guggenbuhl has argued that people often enter the helping professions to control others. Crosby quotes him as stating that "the power drive is given freest reign when it can appear under the guise of moral rectitude and good" and that "religion, used ideologically, can reinforce dysfunctional patterns in a family and/or addictive process; indeed, it can be the source and rationalizer of both."

In all the many twelve-step meetings I've attended, I've heard such statements as "I'm a recovering Catholic" or "When I was in Catholic school the



priests and nuns were really cruel to us” or “I had to leave the convent to truly be myself.” What happens when a priest, brother, or sister enters into a program of recovery? To quote Mark M., “While the person is learning to accept powerlessness, that person’s community may still adhere to notions of power and dominance.” I know of one case in which a sister, involved in a twelve-step recovery group and just about to do her ninth step, was asked by the superior of her community to move to a new city where she had no support system at all. It seems the superior needed to test the sister’s obedience. When the sister noted the poor timing, the superior questioned the sister’s ability to live in community. The sister, being in formation, was invited out of the community within the year—and this was in 1990, not 1960. As Mark M. tells us, “At the root of these conflicts is the most vexing problem of the delicate balance between the recovering self and some external authority.”

## TWELVE-STEP RECOVERY

Two articles have really brought about an understanding of the struggle of religious involved in twelve-step recovery. One article, “From Twelve-Step Program to Formation” by Anne Graham (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Fall 1991) revealingly addresses many of the author’s personal fears, and many communities’ fears, regarding twelve-step people and their journey.

Graham asks, “How does the director ascertain whether for this applicant the statement (“If I drink, I will die”) is literally true, chemically proven? Does the director assume that a candidate’s assessment of his or her symptoms is accurate, or is there room to explore and perhaps question how this conclusion was reached by the candidate?” When I first read this, my still-codependent defenses were sorely tested, and it became difficult for me to hear what she was saying in the rest of the article, where she struggles with “the desire to open such people to the spiritual tradition of my own community’s charism, indicating how and where they are saying in twelve-step terms what has been said yet another way by our religious founder and our rule.”

To make my point, I think it’s important to quote the following from Graham’s article in its fullness:

What does a director do if and when he or she finds statements of boundaries, calls for exceptions, requests for exemptions, or reasons for behavior inserted at times and in situations that suggest manipulation on the candidate’s part? Perhaps this last question might be better put another way: How does the director move beyond fear of upsetting a candidate’s possibly inaccurate, or possibly accurate and incomplete, appraisal of what he

or she needs in terms of personal response and rhythm of life?

Reading Graham’s article, I kept seeing a frightened, insecure individual who feels out of control in the face of people becoming healthy. These perceptions were confirmed when I read this:

Finally, I wonder whether formation personnel are ever going to have the courage to admit to themselves and to others how they feel and then talk about the issues of addiction. . . . Such discussion needs to occur without apology to representatives of twelve-step programs and, at least initially, without their presence.

Secrecy is so much a part of dysfunction.

I was greatly encouraged to find, in the Winter 1992 issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Gerard Chylko’s rebuttal of specific points in Graham’s article. He writes,

I could not understand what was the source of her sense of ambivalence as regards her concern for the candidate’s assessment of his or her symptoms . . . . The admission of being an alcoholic, along with the decision to seek help and recovery, usually comes only after an experience of great pain and anguish, after the person’s denial has been shattered . . . so the person who identifies himself or herself with the words “I am an alcoholic” can be trusted to be making an accurate statement.”

As for Graham’s concern about the candidate’s stating “boundaries,” Chylko speaks clearly of the candidate’s need to continue attending meetings: “regular attendance may mean anything from one to seven meetings a week . . . attendance at such meetings by a candidate could fit into most programs of formation and would not constitute, in my opinion, a serious exception to or exemption from the regular order of a formation program.”

One quote from Chylko’s article says it all for me:

Graham writes that “twelve-step spirituality can cause some problems in formation programs, just as it can in families.” I disagree with this strongly. What causes problems in formation programs and other religious communities and in families are those members who are active alcoholics and addicts, as well as those who suffer from some form of codependency or other dysfunction.”

I believe that Graham’s piece reflects the kinds of attitudes that separate fear-based people from those who have attained some sense of self-identification and self-assertiveness. Her fears echo those of many communities for whom the recovery of a twelve-step person nags at an unacceptable area of self.

## CHURCH AT CROSSROADS

Rigid patterns of thinking are so confining. The structure of many communities, especially in formation programs, has been designed to test the candidate—in a sense, to remake the candidate. To the young and insecure, this testing can appear choiceless.

Albert Ellis, the developer of a counseling technique called rational-emotive behavioral therapy, tells us that the only choice we do not have is the choice to breathe. The choice not to choose is a choice. With the advent of a multitude of counseling techniques and twelve-step programs, I believe the church and religious communities are at a crossroads.

John R. Peteet, M.D., in an article entitled "A Closer Look at the Role of a Spiritual Approach in Addictions Treatment" (*Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, vol. 10), reports that over 15 million people are participating in 500,000 twelve-step groups. When these recovering people seek religious life, priesthood, or ministry as a way to live out their recovery, they will not allow themselves to be put into the role of child or to view superiors, supervisors, and church leaders as parents. These folks will know when a system is oppressive and will set boundaries. My hope is that formation directors will attend open twelve-step meetings, meet with participants in twelve-step programs, and seek ways to integrate the spirituality of the community with the spirituality of twelve-step recovery: to give oneself over to the will of God.

## HUMILITY AND RECOVERY

The rule of life I profess was written in the late 400s by a man named Benedict. Much of his wisdom comes directly from the scriptures and, like the twelve steps, initially came across as countercultural. Living in a society where the ruler was the ruler, Benedict wrote that the prioress or abbot is to be as Christ for the community. Chapter 7 of the rule is humility. Presented below are four of the first five steps of humility, intermixed with the corresponding steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous program.

The first step of humility is that we keep "the reverence of God always before our eyes."

*The first step of AA is "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable."*

The second step of humility is that we love not our own will.

*The second step of AA is "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."*

The third step of humility is that we submit to the prioress/abbot in all obedience for the love of God.

*The third step of AA is "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God."*

The fifth step of humility is that we do not conceal from the abbot or prioress any sinful thoughts entering our hearts, or any wrongs committed in secret, but rather confess them humbly.

*The fifth step of AA is "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrong."*

Will religious communities and the church continue in a dominance mode, or will they be renewed in their souls so that recovery and renewal become the journey of each member? Will communities embrace new members who have the twelve-step experience of looking at their issues of denial, or will communities be threatened by the wholeness these people display when asserting boundaries?

## RENEWAL AS RECOVERY

The prefix *dia-*, found in the word *diabolic*, means torn apart, in two. Many of us, in our programs of recovery, have felt the diabolic in our lives, and have chosen to live through this wrenching to be able to move into a symbolic stance of coming into integrity and knowing ourselves as individuals. When communities continue to wear the habit of "terminal uniqueness," the individual members get lost. We need a renewal that goes far beyond what one wears on one's body. We need a renewal that is a recovery—one that rejoices in the integration and integrity of each member. Perhaps when we have such a renewal, there will not be so much fear about allowing twelve-step people into the community. It is truly diabolic when people fight over spiritualities to the detriment of personal wholeness.

In the article "Recovering from a Sex Addiction" (*HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter 1991), an anonymous priest and Eric Griffin-Shelly write that "twelve-step recovery is successful because it is rooted in human limitations." The rule I follow as a guide to my life speaks of human limitations in many of its chapters. Benedict is acutely aware of human nature, and one of his great concerns is that no one has "cause to murmur." Here is a wonderful example: "An hour before mealtime, the kitchen workers of the week



should receive a drink and some bread over and above the regular portion, so that at mealtime, they may serve one another without grumbling or hardship."

In my opinion, some of the austerity that entered into individual communities wasn't so much a reflection of the founders' desires as it was a manifestation of dysfunctional leaders' need to control and manipulate. As in any family, the dysfunction in the church is generational. Could this be the reason why Vatican Council II asked us to "return to our roots"?

## INTEGRITY OF SELF IS CRUCIAL

What if a basic portion of the formation of new religious were based on the rational-emotive behavioral therapy model? What if each formation director and his or her team were to steep themselves in a form of twelve-step healing as part of their preparation for formation?

Peteet writes, "Experimentation with substances commonly begins in adolescence, during a time of identity formation. . . . Progression to abuse or addiction is found more frequently in individuals who lack a developed sense of self or belonging, and substance abuse often develops later in life after the loss of a defining role or relationship. Addiction in turn contributes to a negative sense of self, which may be denied in a grandiose fashion by more narcissistic individuals, or incorporated in a role as victim by more depressive or paranoid individuals."

Statistics show that by age 16, 90 percent of teens have used or abused alcohol or drugs. In our religious communities, we must set aside our denial and admit that goodly numbers of our members are substance-addicted people. How do we become the catalytic force for healing these members, now and in the future?

Step 12 of Alcoholics Anonymous reads, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

In my religious order, all guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, who said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35).

Mark M. writes, "In recognizing the nature of certain institutions to exercise and abuse powers given them, I am also aware of being totally powerless myself to expect them to conform to my expectations. In this I believe is the freedom to pursue the recurring tensions of selfhood, unencumbered by the constraints of my fixed postures vis-à-vis the world outside me." This freedom also allows us to dream of alternate modes of living the monastic life in the future. I am willing to "fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight"—the fight to maintain integrity of self while living the life we call monastic.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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- Crosby, M. *The Dysfunctional Church*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria, 1991.
- Graham, A. "From Twelve-Step Program to Formation." *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 21–24.
- Peteet, J. "A Closer Look at the Role of a Spiritual Approach in Addictions Treatment." *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 10: 263.
- Schaef, A. *Codependence: Misunderstood and Mistreated*. San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1986.



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# BOOK REVIEW

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*Living a Gentle, Passionate Life* by Robert J. Wicks. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998. 138 pages. \$14.95.

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**T**he title of Robert Wicks's book, *Living a Gentle, Passionate Life*, reads like a contradiction. Given the contemporary expectations of family, work, church, and community, each with its own built-in components of lifestyle, stress, and demands, one might ask how daily life can possibly be considered "gentle" or "passionate." For many, the mundane regimen resembles an intense rat race, a thankless task that is tasteless and, at best, a conundrum. Wicks does not propose a mystical, hilltop-retreat experience as a cozy refuge for living life gently and passionately; few have that luxury and option. Instead, Wicks's spirituality of embracing life in the present moment examines the milieu of ordinary living to uncover balanced perspectives and principles supporting a strong, healthy inner life.

An international lecturer, retreat master, and present chair of the graduate programs in pastoral counseling at Loyola College in Maryland, Wicks has published numerous books on the topic of spiritual and psychological integration. In *Living a Gentle, Passionate Life*, he presents a series of insights and reflections based on the gleaned wisdom of his professional and personal experiences. A superb narrator, he enriches the volume by including incidents and confessions of poignant errors from his personal clinical practice and academic career. In many ways, he candidly asks the reader to learn from his mistakes and recoveries.

*Living a Gentle, Passionate Life* consists of fourteen chapters, each concluding with reflection questions that could be used for personal examination or group discussion. The engagement of these questions is critical if the reader is to experience the full impact of the book to transmit insight and positive results. Wicks presents guidelines and principles of spiritu-

ality to foster dialogue, followed by action steps for implementation. The brevity of the book is deceptive. It is not intended to be read cursorily in one afternoon but to be digested over a period of a month or longer so that a personal inventory process may occur after each chapter.

Wicks's themes range from "Relationships and Friendships," "Silent Hope," "Simplicity and Ordinariness," and "Uncovering Our Own Silent Rules" to "Spiritual Freedom" and "Taking Yourself Lightly." He blends quotations from a variety of religious and wisdom sources, along with psychological theory, personal anecdotes, humor, and challenging questions. He is adept at integrating the psychological and the spiritual to deepen and to enrich holistically the quality of daily life.

To avoid the extremes of quietism (being comfortably and smugly alone with our ego) or specious activism, which can degenerate into compulsive forms of giving, Wicks develops a spirituality that he calls the Circle of Grace to serve as the basis and fruit of a gentle, passionate life. The mutual interactions of quiet reflection and service to neighbor act as checkpoints so that the spiritual journey is replete with fresh energy and compassion. Wicks realistically comments on the difficulty of finding the equilibrium needed for the Circle of Grace to flourish: "Our natural tendency is to actively avoid silence and time alone. Distracting and amusing ourselves with activities is a much more common practice than being involved on a regular basis in the process of reflection and prayer. Thus, when we seek to establish a life of reflection and prayer, we must realize that the process won't go as smoothly as we would like." He cautions us to proceed with humility and patience.

As a spiritual director and pastoral counselor, I see *Gentle, Passionate Life* as a welcome ecumenical and interfaith resource for those in formation, mentoring, healing, or teaching professions. Wicks, who writes with the acquired wisdom of expertise and experience, will assist in nourishing the human spirit with perspective, passion, profundity, and grace.

—John P. Mossi, S.J., D.Min.



# INDEX 1998

## VOLUME 19 NUMBER 1

### How Great Thou Art

James Torrens, S.J.

### Reading, Writing, and Living Soulfully

Francis Dorff, O.Praem., S.T.D.

### Ongoing Religious Formation

Mary Kevin Rooney, A.S.C., M.A.Th.

### The Mind's Role in Healing

Paul J. Bernadicou, S.J.

### Fostering Community Development

Carroll Juliano, S.H.C.J., Rosine Hammett, C.S.C., and Loughlan Sofield, S.T.

### The Power of Compassionate Love

Patrick J. McDonald, M.S.W.

### Steps Toward Completing Life

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

### Leading a Faith-Sharing Group

Alfred J. Micallef, S.J., S.Th.D.

### Life Satisfaction Begins with Trust

Elaine E. Swords

### No Easy Transition for International Seminarians

John C. Kemper, S.S., D.Min.

### We Live by Metaphors

Mary Jo Moran, H.M., Ph.D.

### Book Reviews

*The New Men: Inside the Vatican's Elite School for American Priests*

by Brian Murphy

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.

*My Brother Joseph: The Spirit of a Cardinal and the Story of a Friendship*

by Eugene Kennedy

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.

## VOLUME 19 NUMBER 2

### Is Religious Life Dying?

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.

### The Passion of Anger

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

### Discerning God's Will

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

### The Third Age (An Alternating Current)

James Torrens, S.J.

### Stress in the Lives of Women Religious

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

### The Psychopathic Minister

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

### The Presumption of Priestly Permanence

George Aschenbrenner, S.J.

### Therapy for Leaders

Quinn R. Connors, O.Carm., Ph.D., and Robert W. Lappin, Ph.D.

## VOLUME 19 NUMBER 3

### Leadership or Incumbency?

George Wilson, S.J.

### Conflict Resolution Among Clergy

Reverend William F. Murphy

### Helping Through Listening

Clarisse Belanger, S.S.A., Ed.D.

### A Psychological and Historical Portrait of Jesus

Len Sperry, Ph.D., M.D.

### Mercy

James Torrens, S.J.

### Feasting for Health's Sake

Pamela A. Smith, SS.C.M., Ph.D.

### Funerals Invite Evangelization

Reverend William B. Ross, S.T.

### Emotional Healing

Marie Beha, O.S.C., Ph.D.

### A Report from Germany

Martin Hofmeir, Ph.D.

### The Leadership Dance

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

### Book Review

*Building Community:*

*Christian, Caring, Vital*

by Loughlan Sofield, Rosine Hammett, and Carroll Juliano

Joanne Sullivan, S.H.C.J.

## VOLUME 19 NUMBER 4

### Women in Transition

Mary Jo Moran, H.M., Ph.D.

### Pilgrimages Show Way to Priesthood Vocations

Reverend James M. McNamara

### Midlife Infatuations

Lynn M. Levo, C.S.J., Ph.D.

### Succeeding and Failing

James Torrens, S.J.

### The Borderline Minister

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

### Flawed Communication Within Communities

Mary Ann Flannery, V.S.C., Ph.D.

### Male Spirituality Today

Daniel M. Pietrzak, O.F.M. Conv., Ph.D.

### Monastic Asylums

Benedict Auer, O.S.B.

### An Aquatic Metaphor

Reverend Laurence J. Borges

### Addiction in Communal Life

Julie Wokasch, O.S.B.

### Book Review

*Living a Gentle, Passionate Life*

by Robert J. Wicks

John P. Mossi, S.J., D.Min.

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